Famous Prima Donnas

Lewis C. Strang

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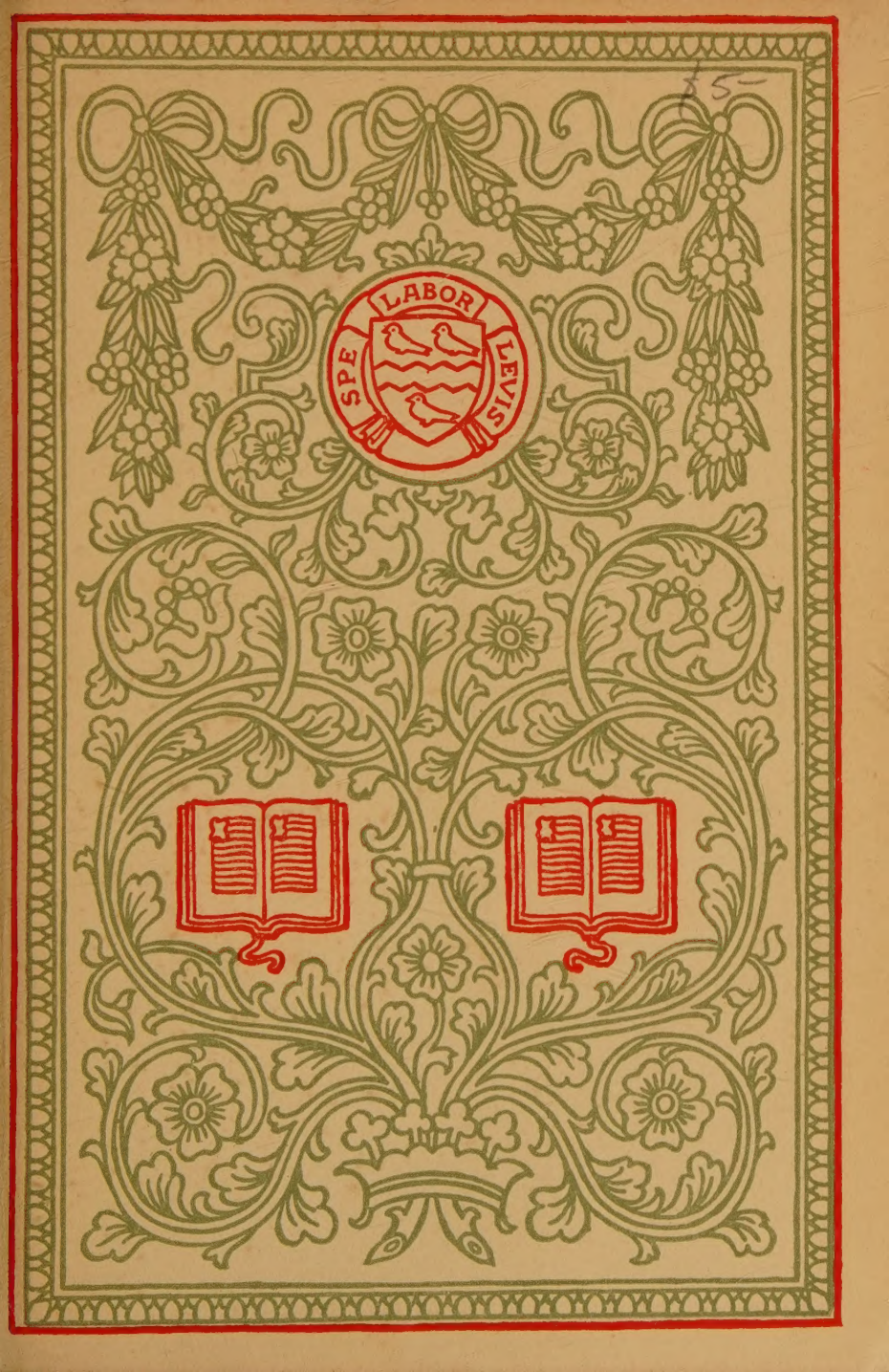
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Lillian Watkins.

Famous Prima Donnas

EDNA MAY
As Violet Grey in "The Belle of New York."

Famous Prima Donnas

By

Lewis C. Strang

Author of "Famous Actors of the Day," "Famous Actresses of the Day," "Famous Stars of Light Opera," "Players and Plays of the Last Quarter Century," etc.

Illustrated

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	INTRODUCTION	ix
I	ALICE NIELSEN	
II.	VIRGINIA EARLE	21
III.	LILLIAN RUSSELL	30
IV.	JOSEPHINE HALL	46
V.	MABELLE GILMAN	56
VI.	FAY TEMPLETON	67
VII.	MADGE LESSING	81
VIII.	JESSIE BARTLETT DAVIS	88
IX.	EDNA WALLACE HOPPER	104
X.	PAULA EDWARDES	113
XI.	LULU GLASER	120
XII.	MINNIE ASHLEY	134
XIII.	EDNA MAY	147
XIV.	MARIE CELESTE	156
XV.	CHRISTIE MACDONALD	172

CHAPTER PAGE

XVI. Marie Dressler 181

XVII. Della Fox 192

XVIII. Camille D'Arville 208

XIX. Marie Tempest 222

XX. Maud Raymond 233

XXI. Pauline Hall 239

XXII. Hilda Clark 253

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

EDNA MAY as Violet Grey in "The Belle of New York" . . . . *Frontispiece*

ALICE NIELSEN in "The Fortune Teller" . 7

VIRGINIA EARLE as Winnifred Grey in "A Runaway Girl" 21

LILLIAN RUSSELL as "The Queen of Brilliants" 42

MABELLE GILMAN in "The Casino Girl" . 56

FAY TEMPLETON singing the "coon" song, "My Tiger Lily" 67

MADGE LESSING 81

EDNA WALLACE-HOPPER 104

PAULA EDWARDES 113

LULU GLASER 120

MINNIE ASHLEY 134

CHRISTIE MACDONALD 172

List of Illustrations

PAGE

MARIE DRESSLER 181

DELLA FOX 192

MARIE TEMPEST 222

Introduction

THE musical stage in the United States may be said to be a birthright rather than a profession. A critical examination of the conditions quickly shows one that the number of women at present prominent in light opera and kindred forms of entertainment, who have earned their positions by continued endeavor and logical development in their art, is comparatively small. The majority are, in fact, the happy victims of personality, who have been rushed into fame chiefly by chance and a fortunate combination of circumstances. They are without the requisite training, either in the art of singing or in the art of impersonation, that would entitle them to be seriously considered as great vocalists or as great actors. They are, however, past mistresses in the

one essential for their profession, — the art of entertaining.

The readiest proof of this peculiar state of affairs is the almost universal brevity of the careers of the women just now in the ascendancy in the musical drama. Ten years of professional life is more than many of them can claim. Arising suddenly into conspicuous popularity as they have, their reputations are founded, not on the sure basis of careful preparation and long and diversified experience, but on the uncertain qualities of personal magnetism and physical beauty. They shine with a glory that is perhaps deceptive in its brilliancy; they are the sought for by many managers, the beloved of a faddish public, and the much exploited of the newspaper press.

The difficulties that encumbered the path of the compiler of this book, dealing with the women of the musical stage in this country, were numerous. First among them was the

choice of subjects. The selection could not be made with deference to any classification by merit, for the triumphs of personality were not amenable to such a classification. The compiler was compelled by the conditions to bring his own personality into the case, and to choose entirely by preference. He could not be governed by an arbitrary standard of comparison; for how can personality, which is a quality, an impression, hardly a fact, and certainly not a method, be compared? In the present instance, the writer found it expedient to limit himself to those entertainers who have given at least some evidence of continued prominence. It may be, therefore, that a few names have been omitted which are rightly entitled to a place in a work of this kind. Nevertheless, the list is surely representative, even if it be not complete.

After the subjects had been chosen, the question, how to treat them, at once became paramount. Again the bothersome limita-

tions of personality asserted themselves; and one perceived immediately that criticism, meaning by that the consistent application of any comprehensive canon of dramatic art, was out of the question. The vocal art of the average light opera singer is imperfect, and the histrionic methods in vogue show little evidence of careful training: they are neither subtle nor complex. Indeed, the average woman in light opera is not an actress at all in the full meaning of the word. She does not fit herself into the parts that she is called upon to play, and she does not attempt expositions of character that will stand even the most superficial analysis. She acts herself under every circumstance. Describe in detail her work in a single rôle, and she is written down for all time.

Yet, should one limit his critical vision to a single part, he not only fails to touch the main point at issue, but he runs the risk, as well, of self-deception and misunderstanding.

The artistic worth of a player of personality is invariably overestimated after the first hearing; and the sure tendency of even the experienced observer, particularly if he be of sympathetic and sanguine temperament, and constantly on the watch for the slightest indication of unusual talent, is to mistake personality for art. The result is that, after indulging himself to the full in eloquent rhapsody, he encounters, upon a more intimate acquaintance, mortifying disillusionment.

What is of genuine value in the player of personality is the elusive force that makes her a possibility on the stage, and the problem is to get that peculiar magnetism on paper. It is a problem unsolved so far as the writer is concerned. One can dodge above, below, and aroundabout a personality, but he cannot pierce directly into it. When it comes to the final word, one is left face to face with his stock of adjectives. Most unsatisfactory they are, too. None of them seems exactly to

fit the case. They serve well enough, perhaps, to convey one individual's notions regarding the personality under discussion, but they are indeed lame and limping when it comes to presenting any definite idea of the personality itself.

As for the biographical data in the book, they are as complete and as accurate as diligence and care can make them. The woman in music is conscientiously reticent regarding the details of her early struggles for position and reputation. Nothing would seem to be so satisfactory to her as a past dim and mystifying, a present of brilliancy unrivalled, and a future of rich and unshadowed promise.

Famous Prima Donnas

CHAPTER I

ALICE NIELSEN

FIVE years ago Alice Nielsen was an obscure church singer in Kansas City; to-day she is the leading woman star in light opera on the American stage. One feels an instinctive hesitation in putting her in the first place, however sure he may be that she is justly entitled to it. He anxiously seeks the country over for a possible rival. He feels that Alice Nielsen has hardly been tested as yet, for she has been only two seasons at the head of her own company, and she has not appeared in an opera which is of itself artistically worthy of serious consideration. Moreover, she is such a little thing, — a child, it would seem, — and is it safe to take seriously a child, even a child of so many and so potent fascinations?

This feeling of doubt, caused by Miss Nielsen's stage youthfulness, is, it appears to me, the pith of the whole difficulty, and therein lurks a curious paradox. Alice Nielsen's great charms are her youth, her spontaneity, and her ingenuousness; but these very qualities are the ones that make one pause and consider before giving her the artistic rank that she has honestly earned. Alice Nielsen seems almost too human to be really great. She is too natural, too democratic, too free from conceit. She is never disdainful of her public, and she is never bored by her work.

One cannot help being charmed by this little woman, who sings as if singing were the best fun in the world; who is so frankly happy when her audience likes her work and applauds her; and who goes soaring up and away on the high notes, sounding clear and pure above chorus and orchestra, without the slightest apparent effort and without a

trace of affectation or of artificial striving for effect. Everybody who has ever written anything about Alice Nielsen has declared that she sings like a bird, freely, naturally, and easily, and this metaphor describes exactly the impression that she creates.

Her voice one appreciates at once, — its volume and its colorful brilliancy, its great range, and its rich, sympathetic, and musical qualities; what he misses in her are the conventionalities of the prima donna, — the awe-inspiring stage presence, the impressive posings and contortious vocalizations. The world is very apt to take one at his own estimate until it gets very well acquainted with him. Alice Nielsen has never proclaimed herself a wonder, and the world has not yet fully made up its mind regarding her as an artist. It acknowledges her great personal charm, her delightful music, but it is not just sure whether she can act.

I regard Miss Nielsen as a thoroughly com-

petent actress in a limited field. She is fitted neither physically nor temperamentally for heroics, but she is fully equal to the requirements of operatic light comedy. She acts as she sings, simply and naturally, and her appeal to her audience is sure and straightforward. As an instance of this, take her striking first entrance in "The Singing Girl." She appears on a little bridge, which extends across the back of the stage. She runs quickly to the centre, then stops, stoops over with her hands on her knees in Gretchen fashion, and smiles with all her might. The action is quaint and attractive, and she wins the house at once. Alice Nielsen's smile is really a wonderful thing, and it is one proof that she knows something about acting. It never seems forced. Yet, when one stops to think, he must see that a girl cannot smile at the same time, night after night, without bringing to her aid a little art. To appear perfectly natural on the stage is the best

possible acting, and that is just what Alice Nielsen does with her smile.

However, "The Singing Girl," for which Victor Herbert wrote the music, Harry Smith the lyrics, and Stanislaus Stange the libretto, like "The Fortune Teller," in which Miss Nielsen made her début as a star during the season of 1898–99, was from any standpoint except the purely spectacular a pretty poor sort of an opera. There was a great deal to attract the eye. The costuming was sumptuous, the groupings and color effects novel and entrancing, and the action throughout mechanically spirited. Mr. Herbert's music, which was plainly written to catch the public fancy, fulfilled its purpose, though that was about all that could be said in its favor. It waltzed and it marched, and it broke continually into crashing and commonplace refrains. It was strictly theatrical music, with more color than melody, showy and pretentious, but without backbone.

There was really only one song in the whole score that stuck to the memory, and that was Miss Nielsen's solo, "So I Bid You Beware." Possibly, even in this case I am giving Mr. Herbert more credit than belongs to him, for Miss Nielsen's interpretation of the ditty was nothing short of exquisite. She found a world of meaning in the simple words, coquetted and flirted with a fascinating girlishness that was entrancing, and flashed her merry blue eyes with an invitation so purely personal that for a moment the footlights disappeared.

Mr. Stange's libretto was wofully weak. It seemed to be full of holes, and into these a trio of comedians were thrust with a recklessness born of desperation. What Mr. Stange did faithfully was to keep Miss Nielsen on the stage practically all the time that she was not occupied in taking off petticoats and putting on trousers — or else reversing the process. To be sure, he succeeded in

ALICE NIELSEN
In "The Fortune Teller."

bringing about these many changes with less bewilderment than did Harry Smith in the case of "The Fortune Teller," the plot of which no one ever confessed to follow after the first five minutes of the opening act. Alan Dale once described this peculiar state of affairs in the following characteristic fashion: —

"In 'The Fortune Teller' the astonishing Harry B. Smith, who must have gone about all summer perspiring librettos and dripping them into the laps of all the stars, has woven a rôle for Miss Nielsen that is stellar but difficult to comprehend. Miss Nielsen appeared as three people who are always changing their clothes. Just as the poor little woman has got through all her vocal exercises as Irma, Mr. Smith insists that she shall be Musette in other garbs. And no sooner has she appeared as Musette and sang something else than Mr. Smith rushes her off and claps her into another garb as Fedor. You

don't know who she intends to be from one minute to another, and I am quite sure that she herself does n't. The variety of dresses, tights, wraps, jackets, and hats sported by this ambitious and earnest little girl is simply astonishing. It must be very difficult to accomplish these chameleon-like changes without getting rattled. Miss Nielsen seemed to enjoy herself, however; and as for getting rattled, she coquetted with her audience as archly after the twelfth change as she did after the first."

Alice Nielsen was born in Nashville, Tennessee. Her father, from whom she probably inherited her musical talent, was a Dane. He was an excellent violinist, but he was never able to turn his gifts to financial advantage. During the Civil War he fought on the Union side and received a severe wound that is believed to have been the indirect cause of his death, which occurred when Alice was about seven years old. Alice Nielsen's mother was

of Irish parentage, — a woman of sturdy and sterling qualities.

After the war the family settled in Warrensburg, Missouri, and remained there until after Mr. Nielsen's death. There were four children in the family, three girls and a boy, and Alice was next to the oldest. After the death of Mr. Nielsen, Mrs. Nielsen removed with her children to Kansas City and opened a boarding-house at the corner of Thirteenth and Cherry streets. Alice was at that time about eight years old. For some years she attended school at St. Teresa's Academy, and later she studied music and voice culture under a Kansas City music-teacher, Max Desci. Many years afterward this tutor claimed the whole credit for developing her voice and for "bringing her out," even going so far as to sue her for $8,000, which he alleged to be due him for music lessons. He lost the suit, however.

Kansas City first began to talk of Alice

Nielsen's voice after she became a member of the choir of St. Patrick's Church, with which she was connected for five years. She married the organist, Benjamin Neutwig, from whom she was divorced in 1898. After her marriage she continued to live in her mother's apartments at Thirteenth and Cherry streets, where, in fact, she made her home until she left Kansas City. Appreciating his wife's unusual gifts, Mr. Neutwig did much to develop them, and it was perhaps due to him as much as to any one else that she became something more than a church singer.

The Kansas City friends of Alice Nielsen relate many interesting incidents of her early life, nearly all of which show indications of the spirit and strength of character that have done so much toward pushing her forward. The following anecdotes, told by a member of St. Patrick's Church choir, were published in the "Kansas City World" : —

"I was in a grocery store near Twelfth and

Locust streets with Alice one day, when she was about fifteen years old, I should judge. A couple of boys of her age were plaguing her. She took it good-naturedly for awhile, but finally warned them to let her alone. They persisted. Then becoming exasperated, she picked up an egg and threw it, hitting one of her tormentors squarely in the face. Of course the egg broke, and the boy's countenance was a sight for the gods. I understand she apologized afterward. This may be recorded as her first hit.

"She joined the choir of St. Patrick's Church, Eight and Cherry streets, eleven years ago, and sang in it about five years, or until she left Kansas City to begin her operatic career. It was there she met Benjamin Neutwig, the organist. A great many persons were jealous of her vocal talents, nor were certain members of the church itself entirely exempt from twinges of envy. Indeed, a no less personage than she who

was at that time choir leader manifested symptoms of this kind to a pronounced degree.

"I remember one Easter service, Alice, then a girl of probably eighteen, was down to sing a solo in Millard's Mass. The leader was angry: she thought the solo should have been assigned to her. Alice knew of the hostility, and it worried her, but she rose bravely and started in. Scarcely had she sung the first line when the choir leader turned and gave Alice a hateful look.

"It had the desired effect. The singer's voice trembled, broke, and was mute. She struggled bravely to regain her composure, but it was useless, — she could not prevail against that malevolent gaze from the choir leader. This, I believe, was the first and only time Alice Nielsen ever failed in public.

"It is a wonder, in the face of petty jealousies of this kind, coupled with the poverty of her mother, which seemed an insurmountable barrier to a musical education, that

Alice's talents were not lost to the world. For every influence tending to push her forward, there seemed a dozen counter influences tending to pull her back. As a child, I have seen her many a time on the street, barefooted, clothing poor and scant, running errands for her mother. Later in life, when she was almost a young lady, I have known her to sing in public, gowned in the cheapest material, and she would appear time after time in the same dress. On such occasions she was often wan and haggard, as if from anxiety or overwork. But once in a while she received the praise which she so richly merited.

"One day Father Lillis received a letter from a travelling man who was stopping at the Midland, in which he asked the name of the young woman who sang soprano in the choir. He had attended church the day before, he said, and had heard her sing. 'It is the most wonderful voice I ever heard,' he

wrote. 'That girl is the coming Florence Nightingale.' I don't know whether the letter was ever answered or not, but Alice came to know of the incident, and it pleased her.

"Both before and after she joined the choir, Alice appeared in amateur theatricals and in church concerts. She was always applauded and appreciated, but it was in the character of a soubrette in 'Chantaclara,' a light opera put on at the Coates Opera House by Professors Maderia and Merrihew, that she created the most decided sensation. This was but a few weeks before she left Kansas City."

Miss Nielsen bade farewell to Kansas City in 1892, going away with an organization that styled itself the Chicago Concert Company, and which planned to tour the small towns of Kansas and Missouri. This, her earliest professional experience, ended in disaster, and Miss Nielsen was stranded in St. Joseph, Missouri, before she had been out a week.

It was an eventful week, however, and Miss Nielsen vividly recalls it.

"We got out somewhere in far Missouri," said Miss Nielsen, "with the thermometer out of sight and hotels heated with gas jets and red flannel. Nobody had ever heard of us. I don't think that in some of the towns we struck they 'd ever heard anything newer than the 'Maiden's Prayer,' and that was as much as they wanted. They called me 'the Swedish Nightingale,' and you can imagine how I felt, — a nightingale in such a climate, and Swedish at that. But I just sang for all I was worth and I tried to educate them, too. I sang the 'Angel's Serenade,' and they did n't like it, because when they tried to whistle it in the audience, they could n't. We did n't carry any scenery; we just had a lot of sheets with us, and used to drape the stage ourselves.

"One 'hall' we came to, there was no dressing-room, so we strung a sheet in one

corner, and some one put a table behind with a lamp on it. The 'ladies of the company' (myself and the contralto) occupied this improvised dressing-room. Suddenly we discovered that we were unconsciously treating the audience to a shadow pantomime performance. There was only one way out of the difficulty, — we women must shield each other. So I held my skirts out while the contralto dressed, and she did the same for me.

"I remember in one place we had managed to excite the hayseeds into coming to hear us, and the hall was quite full. We were giving a little operetta. Somehow or other it did n't seem to please the public, and they were in a mood to be disagreeable, — yes, restless. They wanted their money's worth; they were mean enough to say so.

"We held a consultation behind our sheetings, and the tenor suddenly remembered that once upon a time, when he was a school-

boy, he used to amuse his comrades with tricks. 'Could he do them now?' we asked. He would do his best, he said. So he got a wooden table, hammered a nail into it, bent it a little, and slipped a curtain ring on his finger.

"The trick was to lift the table with the palm of the hand, the ring and nail being invisible. Just in the middle of the trick the nail broke. Well, I believe that audience was ready to mob us. The bass, seeing the situation, made a dive for the money in the front of the house, and we escaped. It was a packed house, too. There must have been as much as eight dollars."

"Did you ever have to walk?"

"Yes, indeed. We walked eight miles once to a town, — snowballed each other all the way. It was lots of fun. When we got there the local paper had an advance notice something like this: 'We are informed that "the Swedish Nightingale" and others intend to give a show in the schoolhouse to-night.

Any one who pays money to go to their show will be sorry for it.'

"The local manager, an Irishman, asked us to sing a little piece for him when we arrived. After we had done so, he said he had never heard anything so bad in all his life. As to the nightingale, he would give her three dollars to sing ballads, but the rest of the troupe were beneath contempt. His language was a dialect blue that was awful. I tell you it was hard luck singing in Missouri."

In St. Joseph Miss Nielsen was fortunate enough to secure an engagement to sing in a condensed version of the opera "Penelope" at the Eden Musée. She received seventy-five dollars for her services, and this money paid the railroad fares of herself and some of the members of the defunct concert company to Denver, Colorado. There her singing attracted the attention of the manager of the Pike Opera Company, which she joined and accompanied to Oakland, California.

Her first part with a professional opera company was that of Yum Yum in "The Mikado." The Pike Opera Company later played in San Francisco, and in that city she was heard in "La Perichole" by George E. Lask, the stage manager of the Tivoli Theatre, which was, and is still, I believe, given over to opera after the style of Henry W. Savage's various Castle Square Theatre enterprises in the East. Miss Nielsen was engaged for the Tivoli Company. She sang any small parts at first, but gradually arose until she became the prima donna of the organization. In all, she is said to have sung one hundred and fifty parts at the Tivoli, where she remained for two years.

While she was singing Lucia, H. C. Barnabee of The Bostonians, which organization was then playing in San Francisco, read of her in the newspapers and went to hear her. The result was the offer of an engagement, which she accepted. Her first part with The

Bostonians was Anita in "The War Time Wedding." Then she was given the small part of Annabelle in "Robin Hood." She also sang in "The Bohemian Girl" and was Ninette in "Prince Ananiàs." The next season she created Yvonne in "The Serenade," and was the hit of the opera, — so much of a hit, indeed, that nothing remained for her but to go starring in "The Fortune Teller."

VIRGINIA EARLE
As Winnifred Grey in "A Runaway Girl."

CHAPTER II

VIRGINIA EARLE

An accomplished and versatile artist is Virginia Earle, who, because of the variety of her attainments and the grace and finish of her art, is entitled to rank with the foremost soubrettes on the American stage. Miss Earle's ability has been tested in many forms of the drama. She has appeared in light opera, in extravaganza, in musical comedy, and in the Shakespearian drama. I question if there is another in her line now before the public who can claim any such extensive experience.

It would be strange if this diversified endeavor had not had its effect on her art. In her we find united with a personality of curiously subtle charm an authority in action that

is restful and refreshing. In her presentation of a part there is neither hesitancy nor misplaced endeavor. She always has command of herself and of the rôle that she is portraying. One never for a moment feels that she is to the slightest degree uncertain as regards the effect that she will produce on her audience. She knows what to do and how to do it.

Yet, when one stops to think of it, her power over her audience is far in excess of what one would naturally expect. Miss Earle is by no means impressive in her stage presence. She cannot be called beautiful. Her singing voice is a modest instrument, though a wonderfully expressive one, it must be acknowledged. Her acting is quiet, even unassuming, but it is also plain, easily comprehended, and always appropriate. She apparently never does anything to attract attention, yet attention rarely fails to be centred on her. This, of course, is due to the finish of her art and a fine technique that

makes its presence felt by its seeming absence.

If Miss Earle cannot justly claim any exceptional advantages in the matter of physical beauty, she certainly has the greater advantage of an intensely magnetic personality. Her individuality, too, is thoroughly distinct. It is one of the paradoxes of acting that the more distinct the artist's individuality, the greater is his ability to set apart one from another the characters which he assumes. Miss Earle has this talent for making each one of her rôles a separate and distinct personage to a greater degree than any of her associates in the musical field. She does this, too, in a strictly legitimate way, by impersonation pure and simple without the aid of make-up.

I remember especially what entirely different persons were her Mollie Seamore in "The Geisha" and her Winnifred Grey in "A Runaway Girl," so different, in fact, that one

who knew her only in the first part found it hard to believe for some time that it really was she in the second part. Those who saw her in "The Geisha" cannot fail to recall the fascinating, quizzical squint that was continually getting into the mischievous Mollie's eyes. I know that I liked it so much that when I saw Miss Earle the next season as Winnifred Grey, the first thing I looked for was the squint. I was astonished to find that it was not there, and disappointed, too, for I had always associated the actress in my own mind with that squint. No sign of it could I perceive until the last act, when it came suddenly into view while she was singing the song about the boy with the various kinds of guesses. It gathered around the corners of her eyes, and it twinkled as merrily as ever. It made me quite happy again, for I felt that I should not be compelled to revise my imagination and repicture Miss Earle without the tantalizing squint.

Miss Earle is a noteworthy example of the long time, the constant endeavor, and the faithful service that are sometimes required to win recognition in the important theatrical centres of the country. She had been many years on the stage before George Lederer finally gave her an engagement at the New York Casino. That was really the first chance that she ever had to prove herself something more than a one night stand favorite, and since that time she has only rarely played outside of New York.

This long-delayed recognition was one of the freaks of fortune for which no one can account. She was apparently one of those unlucky persons who through no fault of their own start wrong. She was born in the West, in Cincinnati, Ohio, on August 6, 1873, and it was in the West that she remained for a number of seasons. Her theatrical career began when she was very young, and the Home Juvenile Opera Company was the

means of introducing her to the stage. This was in 1887, and her first part was Nanki Poo in "The Mikado." Miss Earle also played leading rôles in the other Gilbert and Sullivan operas then so popular, — "Patience," "Pinafore," and "The Pirates of Penzance."

Then she joined the Pike Opera Company and toured the West in a repertory of the best-known light operas. In San Francisco she was engaged by Hallen and Hart, the farce comedy team, and remained with them for two seasons, appearing in "Later On." Her next engagement was with Edward E. Rice, and under his management she went to Australia. Three years were spent there, during which time she acted Taggs in "The County Fair," Gabriel in "Evangeline," Madora in "The Corsair," Dan Deny in "Cinderella," and Columbia in Rice's "World's Fair."

On her return to America she was engaged for Charles Hoyt's farce comedy, "A Hole in

the Ground," acting the lunch counter girl; and after a short but successful season with this mess of nonsense she joined a company under the management of D. W. Truss & Company, playing "Wang" in the places too small for DeWolf Hopper to visit. For two seasons with this organization Miss Earle acted Della Fox's famous part of Mataya. Canary and Lederer of the New York Casino then secured her services, and under their management she assumed leading parts in "The Passing Show," "The Merry World," in which she doubled the rôles of Vaseline and Little Billee, in "Gay New York," and "The Lady Slavey."

As soon as her contract with the Casino expired, Augustin Daly engaged her for his musical comedy company, where she succeeded Violet Lloyd as Mollie Seamore in "The Geisha." Not only did she present this part with ready skill, but she made a second hit as Flora in "Meg Merrilies."

Nor did old comedy daunt her, for as still another Flora, maid to Ada Rehan in "The Wonder," her work was much praised. She crowned her success by appearing in Shakespeare, winning new laurels with her Ariel in "The Tempest." In all these impersonations her readiness in song was of service, but her vivacity counted for much; and, more than that, her magnetic influence over her audience, which it is impossible to analyze. A number of years before, Sarah Bernhardt had taken a fancy to Miss Earle's Taggs in "The County Fair," and had predicted a future for her. Notwithstanding this, however, it is not unlikely that Miss Earle herself would have been incredulous had any one told her a few months before, while she was playing Prince Rouge et Noir in "Gay New York," that within a year she would be a principal in Shakespeare at Daly's.

Dora in "The Circus Girl" and Winnifred Grey in "A Runaway Girl" followed, and

Miss Earle's conquest of New York was complete. She had won recognition at last as a soubrette who was an artist as well as a personality. After Mr. Daly's death Miss Earle returned to the New York Casino, appearing first as Percy Ethelbert Frederick Algernon Cholmondely in "The Casino Girl." This part by no means showed her at her best, although she did fully as well as could be expected with the material with which she had to work.

CHAPTER III

LILLIAN RUSSELL

FOR many years Lillian Russell held without challenge and without serious rivalry the first place among light opera prima donnas in this country. Her triumphs followed one after the other in rapid succession, and her popularity in all the leading cities in the country — and she would visit none except leading cities — was remarkable. "Queen of Comic Opera" she was called; and what a vision of loveliness, she was, to be sure! the most perfect doll's face on the American stage, as some one described it. A golden-haired goddess, with big blue eyes that seemed a bit of June sky, and perfectly rounded cheeks, soft and dimpled like a baby's.

There are two classes of women in the world, — pretty women, whom we see everywhere, and beautiful women, about whom we often read, but whom we seldom see in real life. Lillian Russell was emphatically a beautiful woman. She was almost an ideal. I remember her in all her perfection as Florella in "The Brigands," by W. S. Gilbert and Jacques Offenbach, during the season of 1888–89. Later she learned to act better than she did in those days, — but then she did not need to act. When one saw her, he forgot all about acting. He thought of nothing except Lillian Russell, her extraordinary loveliness of person, and her voice of golden sweetness. She compelled admiration that was almost personal homage. And she could sing, too! Her voice, a brilliant soprano, was rich, full, and complete, liquid in tone, pure and musical.

From 1888 to 1896 were the days of her greatest successes, and the list of operas in

which she appeared during that time is a remarkable one. Besides "The Brigands," there were "The Queen's Mate," "The Grand Duchess," "Poor Jonathan," "Apollo," "La Cigale," "Giroflé-Girofla," "The Mountebanks," "Princess Nicotine," "Erminie," "The Tzigane," "La Perichole," "The Little Duke," and "An American Beauty." Naturally enough, the Lillian Russell of to-day is not the Lillian Russell of ten years ago. Her great beauty has lost some of its freshness, and her voice, though by no means wholly past its usefulness, is worn by the years of constant use in the theatre. She still retains to a remarkable extent, however, her great personal hold on the public. Although the Lillian Russell of to-day fails to maintain the standard of the Lillian Russell of yesterday, there are but few light opera sopranos on the American stage who can fairly rival her even now, and there is no one who is at present what Lillian Russell was ten years ago.

Lillian Russell was christened Helen Louise Leonard. Tony Pastor gave her the name of Lillian Russell, for the very practical reason, I believe, that it had so many "l's" in it, and consequently would look well on a bill-board. Little Miss Leonard was born in Clinton, Iowa. Her father was the proprietor and editor of the "Clinton Weekly Herald," and Lillian Russell's first press notice read as follows: "Born to Mr. and Mrs. Charles E. Leonard, at their home on Fourth Avenue, December 4, 1861, a bright baby girl, weighing nine and one-half pounds." In spite of the fact that this birth notice speaks of a high-sounding Fourth Avenue, Lillian Russell was born in an alley. The house in Clinton, in which the interesting event occurred, was situated in the rear of the office building of H. B. Horton, located on Fourth Avenue, between First and Second streets, and faced east on the alley running north and south between Third and Fourth avenues. At that

time the house was situated almost in the centre of the business section across the street from the Iowa Central Hotel, then the largest hotel in the state and one of the finest west of Chicago. Shortly after the baby's birth the Leonard family removed from their abode on the alley to 408 Seventh Avenue, immediately in the rear of the Baptist Church, and at that time one of the finest residences in the town. Here the remainder of their days in Clinton was spent.

During the first few years of her life there was nothing to distinguish Helen Louise Leonard from any other baby; but by the time she was two years old, she showed the marks of great beauty, having large blue eyes and golden hair. She was not reared among all the comforts of life. Her country editor father was not possessed of wealth, but was compelled to work hard on his prosperous, though none too well-paying newspaper, every day of his life. During the period of Lillian's

babyhood, too, the war forced the prices of luxuries entirely beyond the reach of all but the rich.

Lillian inherited her good looks from her father. Charles E. Leonard was a man of fine appearance, and always dressed in a faultless manner. When he went to Clinton in 1856 he was probably thirty years of age and showed plainly the marks of early culture and training. He, too, was a blond. That he was a man of marked ability is evidenced by the success he achieved in his profession in what was then a scattering Western settlement of not half a hundred houses all told, in the midst of a country unreclaimed and almost wholly unsettled.

On December 18, 1856, he issued the first number of the "Clinton Herald," a weekly publication having as competitors two other well-established newspapers at Lyons, only one mile north in the same county. There was really no field at Clinton at that time for

a newspaper, but Leonard thought otherwise. The panic of 1857 caught the enterprise in the weakness of infancy; but the paper survived the financial storm and eventually came forth on the top wave of success, all of which was undoubtedly due to the excellent business management of Leonard and the strong personality he threw into his work. When the general offices of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad were removed to Chicago in 1865, Mr. Leonard moved the fine job office connected with the "Herald" to that city, as the nucleus for the extensive printing establishment he later acquired.

After the family moved to Chicago, Lillian Russell spent several years in the Convent of the Sacred Heart in that city. Her first music lessons were on the violin, and were given by Professor Nathan Dyer. Then she took vocal lessons from Professor Gill in Chicago. When the time came for him to show off his pupils, he gave a musicale in

Chickering Hall. The fair-haired Lillian sang at this concert "Let Me Dream again" by Sullivan and "Connais-tu le Pays?" from "Mignon." The papers, of course, gave her complimentary notices, one declaring that she sang "like an old professional." Possibly it was this notice that first turned her mind toward the stage. For some time after that, however, she sang in St. John's Episcopal Church on the West Side, and studied with Madame Jennivally, who encouraged her in her ambition to become a grand opera singer. With the idea of studying for the grand opera stage, she went to New York to have her voice tried, and she had taken but a few lessons of the late Dr. Damrosch when Mrs. William E. Sinn persuaded her to join the chorus of Edward E. Rice's "Pinafore" company for the sake of the experience on the stage. This connection lasted about two months and was terminated by her first matrimonial experience, her marriage to

Harry Braham, the musical director of the company. She retired from the stage for a time, but her domestic happiness did not last long. It then became a matter of necessity for her to get an engagement, and she applied in vain to such managers as McCaull and D'Oley Carte, who could find nothing in her voice to warrant them in giving her a chance.

She finally succeeded in getting a position in a curious way. She was living in a theatrical boarding-house, and among her fellow-boarders was a girl who was engaged by Tony Pastor for a specialty act in his theatre, which at that time was situated on Broadway opposite Niblo's Garden. While calling at the house one day to complete some business transactions with this young woman, the variety manager heard Miss Russell singing in a neighboring room. He asked who she was and said he wanted to meet her. He did meet her, and at once offered her fifty

dollars a week to sing ballads at his theatre. Fifty dollars a week was a good salary in those days, and the following Monday saw the name of Lillian Russell, "the English ballad singer," described as one of the leading attractions on the programme.

"I was very cool and collected up to the time that I heard the first note of the orchestra," wrote Miss Russell, in describing her first experience at Pastor's. "From that moment until I had finished my third song, however, I was practically in a trance. I was told afterward that I did splendidly, but to this day I cannot tell what occurred after I went on the stage until I reached my dressing-room and donned my street clothes."

She sung with considerable success such well-known songs as "The Kerry Dance" and "Twickenham Ferry." "The Kerry Dance," in fact, created a bit of a sensation. It was a style of vocal music quite new at that time in the variety theatres. When Mr. Pastor intro-

duced his stage burlesques on "Olivette," "The Pirates of Penzance," and other popular operettas, Miss Russell took part in them, and she also appeared in Pastor's condensed version of "Patience."

Then Colonel John A. McCaull enticed Miss Russell away from Mr. Pastor's by means of a larger salary, and she sang under his management in "The Snake Charmer" at the Bijou Opera House. Her next engagement was with a company under the management of Frank Sanger. It was a strong organization, and some of its members were Willie Edouin, Alice Atherton, Jacob Kruger, Lena Merville, and Marion Elmore. Its tour extended straight through the country to California; and the experience that Miss Russell gained with the distinguished artists of the company was invaluable to her.

A season of concert work was followed by her engagement at the New York Casino, and her appearance in the "The Sorcerer"

and "The Princess of Trebizonde." At this period in her career another man interfered, and the fair Lillian disappeared from the Casino, as did also Edward — they called him Teddy — Solomon, the leader of the orchestra. The couple went to England, where they remained two years, Miss Russell appearing in two operas which Solomon wrote for her, — "Virginia" at the Gaiety Theatre and "Polly" at the London Novelty Theatre.

Miss Russell left Solomon when she learned that another woman claimed to be his wife and returned to the United States. She joined the Duff Opera Company, with which she remained until May, 1888, when she again resumed her place at the head of the New York Casino forces, singing first the Princess in "Nadjy," the part originated by Isabelle Urquhart, when the opera was first produced in New York. The revival ran for something like two hundred nights; and the

popular "Nadjy" was succeeded by "The Brigands," which was also very successful.

The years of her greatest success already referred to then followed. During the season of 1897–98 Miss Russell appeared with Della Fox and Jefferson DeAngelis in "The Wedding Day;" and her last appearances in opera were in April, 1899, in "La Belle Hélène" with Edna Wallace Hopper. During the season of 1899–1900, Miss Russell was with the Weber and Fields Company, whose clever burlesques make life in New York so merry.

Miss Russell was recently asked which one of the many operas in which she had appeared was her favorite.

"'The Grand Duchess,'" she replied emphatically. "That, to my mind, was one of the best comic operas ever written. Then I had a beautiful part in 'Giroflé-Girofla' and 'La Perichole,' but 'The Grand Duchess' was my favorite."

LILLIAN RUSSELL
As "The Queen of Brilliants."

Miss Russell also described interestingly her methods of working up a part: —

"How do I study my parts? Well, every one has his or her own peculiar idea of study and rehearsal, but the true artist always arrives at the same result, with the aid of a clever stage manager and musical conductor. When a part is handed to me, generally six weeks before the opening night, I read it through carefully, picture myself in different positions in the several scenes, and then I separate the music from the dialogue and study the music first. The majority of the operas in which I have recently appeared are of the French or Viennese school, and in the translation there will sometimes appear a word or a sentence that does not harmoniously fit the music. Of course this must be altered before it is finally committed to memory. Then, again, we are all inclined to think ourselves wise enough to improve upon the composer's work, and where a chance is

found to introduce a phrase to show one's voice to better advantage, as a rule, the opportunity is not neglected.

"After I become thoroughly conversant with the music, I take up the study of the dialogue. This, to a comic opera singer, is the hardest task of all; for it is written in the blue book that an interpreter of comic opera cannot act. The desire to overcome this prejudice often has a disastrous result; and instead of doing justice to the rôle and one's self, the fear of adverse criticism will be so overpowering that the delivery of the dialogue, and the attempt to convey the author's idea to the audience, become extremely painful alike to the auditor and the artist. A great many times I have formed my own conception of a part only to find myself entirely in the wrong at the first rehearsal; and then to undo what I had done and to grasp the new idea would confuse me for several days."

To complete the Russell marriage record,

it should be added that in January, 1894, during the run of "The Princess Nicotine," she became the wife of the tenor of the company, Signor Giovanni Perugini, known in private life as John Chatterton. This marriage also resulted unhappily, and was followed by a separation and a divorce.

CHAPTER IV

JOSEPHINE HALL

JOSEPHINE HALL soared into a prominence that she had not before enjoyed, on the screechy strains of "Mary Jane's Top Note" in "The Girl from Paris" during the season of 1897–98. Previous to that, however, she had passed through a varied theatrical experience. She was born in Greenwich, Rhode Island, and came of a very well-known family. Like many others, she acquired her first taste for the stage by appearing in amateur theatricals. The story is that she ran away from home to become an actress, and journeyed to Providence, where she made it known at the stage door of one of the theatres that she was going to win fame by treading the boards, or die in the attempt. She was plain "Jo" Hall

when she made her professional début as Eulalie in "Evangeline" at the Fourteenth Street Theatre, New York, under the management of Edward E. Rice.

After this initial appearance in extravaganza, she forsook the musical stage entirely until she succeeded Paula Edwardes in the title rôle of "Mam'selle 'Awkins," although in the farces with which she was identified for a number of seasons, she usually was given a chance to introduce one or more comic songs. After she left Mr. Rice, she became a member of Eben Plympton's "Jack" company. Then she came under Charles Frohman's management, and was consistently successful in such parts as Evangeline in "All the Comforts of Home," Jennie Buckthorne in "Shenandoah," and Katherine Ten Broeck Lawrence in "Aristocracy." The last two plays, it will be remembered, were by Bronson Howard, and he once took occasion to remark that Miss Hall came nearer

meeting his ideal of the two characters she impersonated than any other actress on the stage.

Then came her big hit in "The Girl from Paris," in which she played the character part of Ruth, the slavey, and sang the ludicrous "Mary Jane's Top Note." How she happened to hit upon this fantastic conception, she once related as follows: —

"I felt that the song would not be a success unless I did something out of the ordinary. The context of the song indicated a high note, which was not given in London, so I conceived the notion of giving a high screech at the climax, which proved to be just what it needed. It was a difficult song to render effectively, as it had to be spoken almost entirely; and as I have a very good ear for music, I found it difficult to keep from singing. The high note had to be off key to make it more ridiculous. I could n't have sung the song for any length of time, as

the strain would have injured my speaking voice."

During the first half of the season of 1899–1900, Miss Hall was the Praline in "The Girl from Maxim's," — a French farce, undeniably dirty, but funny to those not saturated to the point of boredom with the foreign variety of low comedy, which has all the marks of being manufactured to order. It is farce which drives the spectator breathlessly along the road of hilarity by means of a rapidly moving series of mechanically conceived situations. "The Girl from Maxim's" was bluntly suggestive and crudely salacious, as are all these off-color French farces which are turned into English, but it was also bright and ingenious in its machine-like way, and it was in addition very well acted.

Whatever patronage "The Girl from Maxim's" gained outside of New York — and it made money, so I have understood, both in Boston and Philadelphia — was given it, not

because it was audacious, but solely on its merits as an entertainment. It has been shown time and time again that a farce, which is only salacious and nothing more, cannot live on the road. "The Turtle," which was boomed as the smuttiest thing that ever was, but which was also stupid and inane, never earned a dollar outside of New York. "Mlle. Fifi," which was both dirty and boresome, had a similar experience. "The Cuckoo," whose suggestiveness was much exploited, but whose only merits were an exceedingly smart last act and a very fine cast, was only mildly patronized. On the other hand, "Because She Loved Him So," a delightful farce and innocent enough for Sunday-school presentation, enjoyed two seasons of prosperity and kept two different companies of players employed. "At the White Horse Tavern," another fresh and unsmirched farce, also had a prosperous run.

No, whatever success attended "The Girl

from Maxim's " was rather in spite of, instead of traceable to, its filth. It had merit as a mirth-maker. Its spirit was unflagging, its ingenuity amazing, and its character studies capable. There was not a suspicion of a drag until a few minutes before the final curtain, when the indefatigable author, George Feydeau, seemed suddenly to lose his breath.

Josephine Hall's Praline, with all her doubtful morals and her questionable freedom of speech and action, was an exceedingly attractive young woman. She bubbled with merriment, and never for a moment was she to the slightest extent worried even in the midst of the most bewildering complications. Her unfailing good humor was really the backbone of the play.

Indeed, the faculty of making black appear white seems to be something of a specialty with Miss Hall, who has exuberance of spirits without vulgarity or coarseness, and whose unconventionality has coupled with it refine-

ment and inherent delicacy. Her jollity is whole-souled without harshness. Hers is the witchery of personality joined to an art that is authoritative and complete in its own sphere.

"Mam'selle 'Awkins" was an indifferent conglomeration of old stage jokes and tinkling music. That it should have succeeded at all was an odd chance, but that it should have entertained Philadelphia for so many weeks was indeed a mystery. Honorah 'Awkins was a Cockney, who, with a fortune acquired in the soap trade, was on the hunt for a titled husband. This was the plot. The part of Honorah was created by Paula Edwardes, who took her work rather seriously and went in for a touch of artistic character drawing. Miss Hall did not trouble herself much about imitating nature. She relied wholly on her ability to give her audience a good time. She played Mam'selle 'Awkins in a dazzling red wig and a com-

plexion that suggested an hour or two over the kitchen stove, or better still, considering the antecedents of the fair Honorah, over the scrubbing board. Neither did Miss Hall go very heavily into the Cockney; she suggested rather than reproduced, and then fell back on her powers as a fun-maker to win out with her audiences.

For her, this method filled the bill perfectly. Of course, we knew from previous experience that Miss Hall was a capable actress in the hurricane variety of farce, but she did not draw heavily on that side of her artistic equipment in "Mam'selle 'Awkins." She went in head over heels to be as entertaining as possible with the materials at hand, — which, it must be confessed, were not over abundant — and with whatever else she herself could devise. She walked the tight-rope of vulgarity with marvellous expertness, and because she was Josie Hall, one laughed instead of turning up his nose.

In spite of the fact that she has been continually called upon to play all sorts of impossible foreigners, Miss Hall's humor is essentially the humor of the average American. It is fun straight out from the shoulder with the laugh just enough hidden to make it all the more enjoyable when it is discovered. It is not the heavy punning variety so mysteriously popular with the Englishman, nor the *double entendre* of the Frenchman.

Though she may act Cockneys and French grisettes to the end of the chapter, Miss Hall will always be what she was born, — a jolly American girl. And this suggests a brilliant idea, — one that may be novel to those who up to date have had her artistic fate in their hands. Why not give Miss Hall a chance to play the girl next door? Why scour Europe for a human specimen which only warps a personality that belongs right here at home? Try her once in a character — farcical natu-

rally — that has some native stuff in it. Let her show us a girl whom we know first-hand as the genuine article. I think that the result would be a surprise for somebody.

CHAPTER V

MABELLE GILMAN

VERY much in evidence in the unusually strong and brilliant cast, even for the New York Casino, that lent its assistance to such good purpose in bringing into popular favor during the season of 1899–1900 that really amusing as well as highly colored vaudeville, "The Rounders," was Mabelle Gilman, — a young woman whose stage experience has been short, but whose histrionic and musical talent, remarkable beauty, winsome personality, and artistic temperament would seem to make comparatively safe the prophecy of an especially rosy future. Miss Gilman has two most valuable qualities that are many times lacking in girls who enter the musical field,— strength of character and will power. One

MABELLE GILMAN
In "The Casino Girl."

has only to see her on the stage to be convinced that she is not one that will be content to drift willy-nilly with the tide on the calm sea of self-satisfaction and unambitious gratification.

Equipped, as I am sure she is, with a serious art purpose, and richly endowed, as I know that she is, with so much that brings success in the theatre, her reputation will not long be confined, as is at present the case, to the comparatively narrow limits of two or three of the most important theatrical centres.

Indeed, when one considers her youth — she is not yet twenty years old — and the few seasons that she has been before the public, Miss Gilman's advancement has been little short of phenomenal. Although she was born and educated in San Francisco, the professional labors that have won for her her present position in musical comedy have been entirely confined to New York, with the exception of a single short engagement in

Boston and another in London. This has been, on the whole, a fortunate circumstance, for it has undoubtedly kept her keyed up to her best endeavor, and it has also saved her from the energy-dissipating fatigue of constant travel, and the artistic inertia resulting from long association with a single part. On the other hand, it has unquestionably limited her reputation, and also deprived her of the lessons to be learned from acting before all sorts and conditions of humanity. The New York public is oddly provincial in its narrow self-sufficiency, but, worse than that, it has in a highly developed form the sheep instinct of follow-my-leader. It is both faddish and freakish, and on that account its judgments are not always to be trusted and its influence is sometimes to be deplored.

New York is a wonderfully amusing city — to the outsider who watches its antics from a safe distance. It has the atmosphere of an excessively nervous woman, watching appre-

hensively a mouse-hole; it is constantly on the verge, occasionally in the very midst of, hysteria. It enjoys no intellectual calm, no quiet repose, no philosophical serenity. It is always gaping widely for a sensation, real or manufactured, eager as the child who is all eyes for the toy-balloon man in the Fourth of July crowd. Many times has this hysterical tendency moulded the affairs of the theatres in New York, and for that reason New York's judgment can be by no means the all in all to the country at large. A New York reputation, which means so much to the average man and woman connected with the stage in this country, may result in a temporarily inflated salary, but it does not necessarily promise long-continued success. Far from it! New York, after all, is merely a centre, not the centre, as the dwellers within its walls are firmly convinced is the case. It is not London monopolizing the whole of Great Britain, and it is not Paris,

by common consent the privileged representative of France.

In the case of Miss Gilman, however, the judgment of New York is fully justifiable. Rarely lovely as she is, — a perfect brunette type, black hair, black eyes, and expressive face, — she does not rely on her beauty, nor on the attractiveness of her personality for success; she is an actress as well. It should be understood that the spoken drama and the musical drama are two different things. The ideal of the first is to create an impression of naturalness and fidelity to nature. It has its conventions, but they are every one of them evils, which are continually being uprooted by the combined intelligence of the dramatist, the actor, and the theatre-goer. Conventions, on the other hand, are the very life of the musical drama, which is in its whole scheme a travesty on nature and a violation of dramatic art. The musical drama is art purposely artificial. Consequently, while the

actor in the spoken drama strives to the best of his ability for sincerity and conviction, and feels that he has attained the highest when he causes the spectator of his mock frenzy to forget absolutely that the emotion engendered is only a wilful simulation of the genuine article, the actor in the musical comedy is purposely and frankly artificial. He is limited to presenting the symbol without in the least striving for deception.

It is the quality of inherent insincerity that makes anything approaching sentiment dangerous in the musical drama. The highly dramatic and the essentially farcical can be utilized in this form of stage representation with equal facility; but when the musical drama approaches the comedy field of the spoken drama, it begins at once to tread on dangerous ground. For this reason Miss Gilman's greatest achievement in "The Rounders" was the remarkable success with which she accomplished the formidable task of mixing

sentiment into a musical comedy. Her rôle of the little Quakeress married out of hand to a sportive Frenchman really had an element of pathos in it, — a hint of pathos, as it were, not enough to be ridiculous, but just enough to add a touch of human interest and character contrast to the picture, and thus to make Priscilla something more than a lay figure in a popular vaudeville.

There was art in the characterization, the art of the sensitive and essentially feminine woman, and this art appealed strongly to the chivalrous side of man's nature; he felt at once the instinctive desire to protect this woman so remarkably impressive in her feminine way. So modest, so demure, so innocent, and so altogether appropriate was the quiet gray of the Quakeress gown worn by Miss Gilman, that the sight of her later on in the bathing suit that would not, perhaps, have caused much comment at Newport, was a distinct shock, while the dance that went

with the bathing costume song — a dance of many boneless bendings and gymnastic kicks and contortionist feats — was only believed as a fact because it was seen. Theoretically, one would be justified in claiming that Miss Gilman never danced it.

Moreover, according to all precedents, this astonishing exhibition should have destroyed at once and forever all the sentiment in Miss Gilman's Quakeress, but, as a matter of fact, it did nothing of the kind. When she resumed her quiet gray, she was again the same winsome, pathetic, in-need-of-protection little thing as before. A paradox such as this is only explainable in one way: the perpetrator of it knows how to act and is something more than a prettily decorated bit of personality.

Another surprise, which Miss Gilman has in store for those who pass judgment regarding her complete artistic equipment at first sight of her face, is her singing voice. I

know that I expected to hear the plaintive, faint, and indefinite piping that goes with so many girlishly innocent soubrettes. It proved, however, a full and satisfying soprano, rich and mellow, a soprano which did not make holes in the atmosphere on the top notes. She has had the advantage of instruction in singing from Mr. George Sweet of New York, who is justly proud of his pupil.

While Miss Gilman was a student at Mills College in San Francisco, Augustin Daly heard her recite, and was sufficiently impressed with her ability to offer her a place in his New York company. She lost no time in coming East and at once signed with Mr. Daly for a term of five years. His death occurred before this contract had expired, and it was thus that it happened that Miss Gilman was free to join George W. Lederer's forces at the Casino in New York.

While under the management of Mr. Daly,

Miss Gilman played in "The Tempest" and "The Merchant of Venice." Her Jessica in the latter drama was an exquisitely charming bit, and received the especial commendation of Mr. Daly. Of the Daly musical comedy productions she appeared in "The Geisha," "The Circus Girl," "La Poupée," and "A Runaway Girl." Priscilla, in "The Rounders," was her first part at the Casino, and during the spring of 1900 she was one of the prominent features in "The Casino Girl," a Harry B. Smith product. The fineness of Miss Gilman's art as shown in this work was thus commented on: —

"The production brings distinctly to the front Miss Mabelle Gilman, one of the most conscientious young actresses on the stage. Miss Gilman's work shows that she is a careful student of her art. Everything is done by method, and yet with such ease and naturalness that one might imagine it was play and no work. Miss Gilman has a sweet,

well-cultivated voice, and uses it apparently without effort, but to the greatest advantage."

Miss Gilman's experience at the Casino has developed in her an appreciation of comedy and a quiet vein of humor that she had not previously shown.

FAY TEMPLETON
Singing the "Coon" Song, "My Tiger Lily."

CHAPTER VI

FAY TEMPLETON

BORN almost literally in the theatre, and cradled as a baby in a champagne wardrobe basket, a full-fledged "professional" at the tender age of three years, it would have been marvellous, indeed, if Fay Templeton had become anything else except an actress. When I heard these tales of Fay Templeton's life in the nursery period of her existence,— stories of how she had often slept in the dressing-room while her mother, Alice Vane, died nightly in the leading rôle of some old-time tragedy, of the nights and the days of travel, of all the nerve-racking hardships that made up the weary, weary life of the actor "on the road," — I was strongly reminded of the early life of Minnie Maddern Fiske.

Both were children of the theatre; and forthwith we who are not children of the theatre exclaim, how pathetic that is! So they seem to me, I must confess, these children without homes and without companions of their own age, knowing nothing of the pleasure of quarrelling and making up again, children whom one never thinks of as young, and yet who cannot really be old, brought up as they are in the indescribable and contradictory atmosphere that is characteristic of the stage, an atmosphere of hypocrisy and simple-mindedness, of contemptible smallness of spirit and self-sacrificing generosity, of petty spitefulness and frank good fellowship, of foolish jealousies and whole-souled democracy. With all their artificiality, superficiality, and self-sufficiency, I think that there is, on the whole, more frankness, sincerity, and honest selfishness among stage folks than among any other class of society. In certain respects, actors are in their relations with one

another far less the actor than are many persons who are not supposed to act at all.

A strange thing must life seem to the child of the theatre, when he gets old enough to think about it. He looks upon the world topsy-turvy, as it were. The serious things of his life are the frivolities of the work-a-day world, and the viewpoint of these work-a-days must be a constant source of perplexity to him. He must wonder, for instance, why they go to the theatre at all, why they are so foolish as to spend money, which is such a rare and precious thing, to behold the commonplace and dreary business of play-acting. How he, the pitied one of the world of homes and domesticated firesides, in his turn must pity those easily beguiled individuals who practise theatre-going! How he must smile ironically at their sophisticated innocence and be even shocked at their unaccountable ignorance! Thus it happens that he pities us because we have illusions about things that he knows

are the crudest delusions, and we pity him because he lives a life so far apart from ours that we can see nothing in it but hardship and unhappiness. We of the homes waste our tears on him who feels no need of a home, who, contented with his lot and glorying in his freedom, scorns publicly the narrow monotony of a seven A. M. to six P. M. with an hour off for luncheon at noon existence. Which is right? Both — and neither.

But to return to Fay Templeton and Mrs. Fiske. Miss Templeton made her first appearance on the stage when she was three years old, dressed as a Cupid and singing fairy songs. Mrs. Fiske began even younger, and she, too, was a singer. Arrayed in a Scotch costume of her mother's making, she piped in a shrill treble between the tragedy and the farce a ballad about "Jamie Coming over the Meadow." After this infantile experiment, however, Mrs. Fiske forsook the lyric stage practically for good and all,

although she did at one time play Ralph Rackstraw in Hooley's Juvenile Pinafore Company. Miss Templeton, on the other hand, clung faithfully to opera and the allied forms of theatrical entertainment, particularly that branch known as burlesque, in which she was and still is an adept without a compare. The nearest that she ever came to being identified with what player-folk delight to call the "legitimate" was when at the age of seven years she played Puck in Augustin Daly's production of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" at the Grand Opera House in New York. This was considered a remarkable impersonation, especially for a child of seven, and it received the special commendation of Mr. Daly himself. Miss Templeton's success at so youthful an age was, to be sure, most unusual, but it was by no means inexplicable, if one only knew that she had had, even at that time, four years' experience on the stage, and that she had

starred, principally throughout the West and South, at the head of a company managed by her father, John Templeton.

The generalization that infant stage prodigies never amount to anything has fully as great a percentage of truth in its favor as any other generalization, but there are occasional exceptions. Mrs. Fiske, already referred to, was one; Della Fox was another; and Fay Templeton was a third, and possibly the most remarkable case of all. Mrs. Fiske at least had the advantage of the intellectual training of the classic drama, and Della Fox, after her precocious success as a child, was kept faithfully at school for a number of years by stern parental authority; but Fay Templeton during her childhood was continually associated — with the possible exception of Puck — with the lightest and frothiest in the theatrical business. More than that she was at the head of the company, the star, the praised and petted. Whoever saved her

from herself and the disastrous results of childish self-conceit is entitled to the greatest credit.

After her hit in New York in "A Midsummer's Night's Dream," Miss Templeton travelled to San Francisco with her father and James A. Herne. There she became a prima donna in miniature, and charmed the Californians, especially by her imitations of the prominent grand opera and comic opera artists of the day. Her San Francisco experience was followed by her appearance at Niblo's Garden, New York, as Parepa Rosa, Aimée, and Lucca. The next half-a-dozen years were spent principally in the South, where she starred in a repertory of which her Puck in "A Midsummer's Night's Dream" was the chief feature.

Fay Templeton was fifteen years old when she became a recognized light opera star of national reputation. She was the original in this country and the best-known Bettina in

"The Mascotte," and she also appeared in "Giroflé-Girofla." For two years she played Gabriel, which was created by Eliza Weatherby, one of the most beautiful of the Lydia Thompson burlesquers, in "Evangeline," and she was also in the revival of "The Corsair."

At the Fourteenth Street Theatre, New York, in August, 1890, after a period of absence from the stage, Miss Templeton brought out the burlesque called "Hendrick Hudson; or, The Discovery of Columbus," by Robert Frazer and William Gill. This told an imaginary story of the meeting, at the El Dorado Spring in Florida, of Columbus lost on his third expedition to America, and Hudson. It was not an unfruitful theme for burlesque treatment, but the work itself was poorly put together, disconnected, and prone to drag. Neither was Miss Templeton herself all that could be desired. She was apparently in a state of transition. She had lost the roguish girlishness that made her

Gabriel so charming, and she had not yet learned to give free rein to the rich individuality and the unctuous humor that are so characteristic of her work at the present time. No dramatic critic would say to-day, as was said at that time, of the production of "Hendrik Hudson," that "it must be written, in reluctant sorrow, that Miss Templeton was not sufficient in talent nor in charm to lead a burlesque company to great success." Miss Templeton was not seen again, after the short and inglorious career of "Hendrik Hudson," until she brought out "Mme. Favart" during the season of 1893–94.

The piece that re-established her in public favor, however, was "Excelsior, Jr.;" New York, in particular, finding her impersonation of the up-to-date young man about town very much to its liking. After she joined the Weber and Fields organization in New York and unexpectedly shone forth as a marvellously entrancing interpreter of "coon" songs,

she clinched her hold on the public with which she is now an established favorite.

During the season of 1899–1900 Fay Templeton was identified with those two gorgeous productions, "The Man in the Moon" and "Broadway to Tokio," besides taking a flyer into vaudeville, where she first brought out her wonderful imitation of Fougère, the French chanteuse. In shows like "The Man in the Moon" and "Broadway to Tokio" one is expected to have nothing with him except the two senses of sight and hearing. It is the spectator's part to take what comes — and it is supposed to come constantly and rapidly — simply for the sake of the moment's fun that there may be in it. His cue is to laugh at the stage jokes of the hard-worked comedians, and to be dazzled into a semi-hypnotic state by the dancing women posturing amid marvellous effects of light and color. They are eminently entertainments to be felt and not thought about. One

is constantly receiving new impressions, and just as constantly forgetting all about them. The result is that after the shows are all over, one is surprised to find that from the mass of material he has retained no one impression distinctly. He remembers only flashes here and there.

One figure, however, was revealed by each and every one of these memory flashes, — that of Fay Templeton, whose wonderful versatility as an entertainer, and whose pure virtuosity as an artist, both of them given free rein in these spectacles, raised her head and shoulders above her associates in the two casts.

In "The Man in the Moon" there was nothing else that evidenced half the art shown in her singing of the ditty "I Want a Filipino Man." It was, it is true, a fearfully suggestive study of elemental human passion, a song of hot blood and crude, unblushing animalism. But it was wonderfully well done,

and the swing of its rhythmic sensuality was not to be resisted.

Two things that Fay Templeton did in "Broadway to Tokio" I recall with especial vividness. One was her treatment of the cake-walk, commonly a prosaic, athletic exhibition of increasing boredom. She evolved from the conventional prancing of the gay soubrette a dance whose appeal to the imagination was intense, a dance into which might be read many meanings. Her cake-walk was the embodiment of languorous grace and the acme of sensuous charm. It breathed an atmosphere of tropical indolence. It suggested the lazy enjoyment of the cool of the evening after a long day of hot, fierce summer sunshine, the time when one dreams idly of fleshly delights. It was a dance teeming with passion, passion quiescent, which a breath would fan into a blaze.

Miss Templeton's second remarkable achievement was her imitation of Fougère,

or, better still, her impersonation of Fougère. It is difficult to describe intelligently just the effect of Miss Templeton's art in this specialty. It was not a photographic copy of the external Fougère; it was rather a reproduction of the Fougère personality. Indeed, she pictured only with indifferent fidelity the Fougère mannerisms, but she placed before one, with almost uncanny accuracy, the Fougère individuality and the Fougère stage appeal.

It was, in fact, acting as distinguished from mimicking. Fay Templeton literally represented Fougère as she might a dramatist's imaginary personage. Temperamentally, Miss Templeton does not in the remotest way suggest Fougère. The French woman, indeed, is just what Fay Templeton is not. She is thin, she is nervous with a champagne sparkle, and she is perpetually and restlessly vivacious in her artificial French way. Fay Templeton is not thin, and her personality is far away

from nervousness. Where Fougère would worry herself half to death, Fay Templeton would insist on solid comfort and plenty of time to think, even a chance to sleep, over the vexing problem. One pictures Fay Templeton as passing her leisure moments in the luxurious embrace of a thickly wadded couch piled high with the softest of pillows. Nor is hers the champagne temperament, — rather that of rich and mellow old Madeira, a wine of substance, of delicate aroma and of fruity flavor, which does not immediately bubble itself into a state of insipidness.

MADGE LESSING.

CHAPTER VII

MADGE LESSING

MADGE LESSING had been on the stage a number of years before she suddenly sprang full into the illuminating power of the lime-light of publicity as the principal part of the astonishing success of that alluring beauty show, "Jack and the Beanstalk." At that time everybody made the discovery that no one knew exactly who she was, and Miss Lessing has succeeded even to this day in shrouding her early life in mystery. This much is known, — that she ran away from home to go on the stage. She came to the United States from London about 1890 and became a chorus girl at Koster and Bial's in New York. She remained in that humble position only a week, being promoted at one

step to the title rôle in the burlesque, "Belle Hélène." Her next engagement was with the Solomon Opera Company, and this was followed by her appearance in "The Passing Show" and "The Whirl of the Town."

As far as the casual theatre-goer was concerned, however, she did not exist until the Klaw and Erlanger production of "Jack and the Beanstalk." This extravaganza, like "1492," also the work of R. A. Barnet, was first brought out by the First Corps of Cadets of Boston, and it is still counted the greatest success that this brilliant troupe of amateurs ever had. In the Cadet performances the principals and chorus were all men, and naturally this order of things was changed when the extravaganza passed over into the professional hands. Otherwise it was given practically in its original form.

Mr. Barnet struck a veritable gold mine when he hit upon the idea of dramatizing Mother Goose. "Jack" was his first plough-

ing of this field, and although he has worked it often since, he has not yet succeeded in getting from the old ground another crop so exactly suited to the popular taste. Mr. Barnet undoubtedly got his general scheme from the annual London pantomimes. His work was loosely constructed, and his lines were not all of them of the kind that readily cross the footlights. His wit, while wholly conventional, was also a trifle involved. It did not sparkle. His situations, on the other hand, were effective, and especially were they adaptable to expansion under the gentle administration of a stage manager with an eye for light and color and pleasing groupings. In the process of development the spectacular qualities of "Jack and the Beanstalk" came prominently into the foreground, while the literary qualities — a purely descriptive phrase, which in this connection gracefully designates a condition without stating a fact — were lost in the midst of the substi-

tutions by players with specialties. The stage wit of actors has one advantage over that of writers of dialogue; it may not be analyzed, it may be utterly inane on examination, but it does crackle for the moment. In fact, it exists only because it crackles.

Thus "Jack and the Beanstalk" became in the course of its evolution the conventional spectacular extravaganza of theatrical commerce, of which Mr. Barnet was the sponsor rather than the creator. It was also, at the time of its production, a marvellous exploitation of feminine loveliness, and the especial gem of the great array was the bewildering vision of physical perfection, Madge Lessing, in the principal boy's part of Jack. No great amount of histrionic talent was demanded of her, for her success depended, not so much on what she did as how she looked.

Madge Lessing then and there established herself as the exception that proved the rule. I confess that I usually find the woman in

tights a decided disillusionment. Instead of making a subtle and seductive appeal to the imagination, she is a prosaic fact; interesting, possibly, as an anatomical study, she loses in a peculiar way the fascinations of the feminine gender. When tights enter into the problem, there is a vast difference between the womanly woman and the womanish woman. The first is a rare and, I may also add, a pure delight. The second is merely an embarrassment.

Miss Lessing belonged, in "Jack and the Beanstalk," to the class of womanly women. She was as femininely alluring amid the bald disclosures of unblushing fleshings as amid the tantalizing exasperations of swishing draperies. Her beauty was exuberant, voluptuous, pulse-stirring, — a laughing, happy face, crowned and encircled with tangled masses of dark brown hair, which made her head almost too large, to be sure, though size counted for little amid the ravish-

ments of sparkling eyes and kissable dimples that danced in and out on either cheek.

Miss Lessing walked through this part of Jack — walking through was all that was demanded of her — with a pretty unaffectedness that met all requirements, and she sang with a voice of considerable sweetness, but of no great power. Still, she has in a mild, inoffensive way some small ability as an actress. This was shown in "A Dangerous Maid" and in "The Rounders," which followed her engagement in that failure imported from London, "Little Red Riding Hood," which was brought out in Boston just before Christmas, 1899.

In "The Rounders" Miss Lessing succeeded Mabelle Gilman as Priscilla during the run of that brisk vaudeville at the Columbia Theatre, Boston. It is a thankless task, that of successorship which results inevitably in direct comparisons, but Miss Lessing met the test surprisingly well. Without Miss Gilman's strength of personality and less appar-

ent art, Miss Lessing indicated with unmistakable correctness the sentimental atmosphere of prudish modesty, which represents Priscilla as a dramatic character. With memories of "Jack and the Beanstalk" — they seem inevitable where Miss Lessing is concerned — one was a little bewildered at Priscilla's embarrassment in her ballet costume during the scene in Thea's dressing-room. This bewilderment was due to Miss Lessing's inability to impersonate. She is always Madge Lessing acting, — never Madge Lessing identified with another and wholly different personality; and at the sight of Madge Lessing embarrassed because she wore tights, one had a right to be bewildered.

During the Spring of 1900 Miss Lessing also appeared in the title rôle of "The Lady Slavey" when that musical farce was revived in Boston.

CHAPTER VIII

JESSIE BARTLETT DAVIS

THE name and fame of Jessie Bartlett Davis are linked inseparably with the history of that prominent light opera organization, The Bostonians, with which she was connected for ten years, and from which she resigned during the summer of 1899. If the proprietors of The Bostonians had ever acknowledged that it were possible for any one to be a star in their troupe, that star would have been Mrs. Davis. To be sure, tradition would have been violated by such a procedure, for Mrs. Davis is a contralto, and tradition decrees that a soprano shall be the only woman star in opera. The composer naturally conceives his heroine as a soprano. In fact, his heroine must be a soprano in order that he may invent brilliants for her to sing. You

cannot do that sort of thing for the mellow-toned contralto, and consequently she is never the centre of feminine interest. When a composer needs a contralto for a quartette or something of that kind, he usually puts her in tights and calls her a man, gets her as little involved in the plot as possible, gives her some heart-throbbing songs and uses her voice effectively for padding in the choruses, where the high notes of his heroine soprano shine like diamonds.

There is, however, one seriously practical reason for the neglect of the contralto, Sopranos, good, bad, and indifferent, are almost as common as piano-players, but contraltos — even bad and indifferent contraltos — are rare enough to be noted when found; while contraltos that vocally are entitled to rank with the best light opera sopranos are so uncommon it is not strange that no one thought it worth while to write operas especially for them.

When one does find such a contralto, he hears a quality of tone that is charged with sympathetic appeal. Where the soprano is sparkling, the contralto is thrilling. Where the soprano is vivacious, happy, delighting in the sunshine, the contralto is fervid, passionate, and throbbing with sentiment. In Mrs. Davis's case, with the voice is also united an attractive personality and comely face and figure, as well as no mean gifts as an actress. Mrs. Davis's natural voice is a magnificent instrument, but whether she made as much of it as she might, especially in later years, is a question. A large voice carries with it its responsibilities. The singer, with vast resources at his command, finds it so easy to make an impression on the unmusicianly auditor merely by letting the big voice go, to win applause by making a tremendous volume of sound, that one need not be surprised to discover in such a singer a growing tendency toward

broad and somewhat coarse effects and a lessening appreciation of delicacy, of light and shade, of phrasing, and of the finer variations of expression.

However, if Mrs. Davis has made such a criticism not altogether undeserved, it is equally true that she has never permitted herself — even after her performances of Alan-a-Dale in "Robin Hood" passed the two-thousandth mark — to become wholly a victim of musical charlatanism, which in the "Robin Hood" instance just cited would not only have been excusable but was wellnigh unavoidable. She has never been forgetful of the art of interpretation and of expression, and by means of her beautiful voice she has kept herself well in the lead among the light opera contraltos.

Sympathy in a contralto is a prime essential. She must appeal to the heart with her rich, pulsating tones. It is not her province to electrify by vocal gymnastics; she is the

conveyer of emotion. If this emotion be true and honest and sincere, then the singer brings a message that enriches, ennobles, and broadens; if, on the other hand, the emotion be false and artificial, the singer, however admirable her art in other respects, fails lamentably in a most important particular. The highest praise that can be given Mrs. Davis is that she has rarely failed to impress her audiences with the truth and sincerity of the emotion inspired by her music.

Jessie Bartlett Davis was born in Morris, Illinois, a little town not far from Chicago, in 1866. She came from good New England stock, her parents having moved to Illinois from Keene, New Hampshire, where her father was the school-teacher, the leader of the church choir, and the instructor in music to the few persons in the town who cared to employ him in that capacity. One day he fell in love with a seventeen-year-old miss, who applied to him for a position as school-

teacher, and shortly after married her. The Bartlett family was a large one, — four girls and four boys, besides Jessie, who might be called the pivot of the family, three of the boys being older and three of the girls younger than she. It is interesting to know, too, that during the Civil War Mrs. Davis's father enlisted and served his time as a soldier.

There was no spare money in this household to spend on a musical education for Jessie Bartlett, who began to sing almost before she could talk. When she could scarcely toddle, she would climb on the stool before the old-fashioned melodeon, strike away at the notes of the instrument with her tiny fists, and sing at the top of her voice. Her father taught her all that he knew about music, and by the time that she was twelve years old, she was the leading spirit in every musical event in the town. Her voice was something tremendous, — "loud enough to

drive every one out of the schoolhouse when I opened my mouth," according to her own statement. In fact, she was at that time chiefly concerned about the amount of noise that she could make, and she used her big voice at the fullest extent, habitually and wilfully drowning out anybody who dared to join in the singing when she was present. She sang in the church choir, and wherever else there was any one to listen to her.

Finally, when she was fifteen years old, she became a member of Mrs. Caroline Richings Bernard's "Old Folks'" Concert Company at a salary of seven dollars a week, and her voice, even then, uncultivated as it was, attracted considerable attention. When the troupe disbanded in 1876, she returned to her home in Morris. Next she was given an engagement to sing in the Church of the Messiah in Chicago, and the whole family moved to that city with her. While singing in church, she also studied with Fred Root,

son of George F. Root, the composer of many popular ballads.

The "Pinafore" craze was directly responsible for Jessie Bartlett's entrance into opera. John Haverly heard her sing while he was making the rounds of the church choirs looking up members for the Chicago Church Choir "Pinafore" Company, and engaged her for the part of Little Buttercup at a salary of fifty dollars a week. It was therefore in this rôle that she made her début on the operatic stage. At the end of the season she married the manager, William J. Davis, who is at present prominently connected with theatrical affairs in Chicago.

Mr. Davis firmly believed in his wife's future, and after her "Pinafore" engagement was over he advised her to decline all further offers until she had learned better how to use her voice. He took her to New York, where she became a pupil of Signor Albites. Then Colonel Mapleson, who was at that

time managing Adelina Patti, heard her sing and advised her to study for grand opera. It happened, not long after, that the contralto who was to appear as Siebel in "Faust" with Patti was taken ill. There was no substitute in the company, and Colonel Mapleson came to Mrs. Davis in a great state of mind. It was then Saturday, and the performance of "Faust" was to be on the following Monday. Her teacher coached her in the part all that day, and Saturday night was spent in memorizing the words and music. Sunday was given over to a thorough drill in the customary stage business of Siebel's part, and the memorable Monday night found the aspirant ready, but fearful and trembling.

"What frightened me more than anything else," said Mrs. Davis, "was the romanza that Siebel sings to Marguerita. I was so afraid of Patti, whom I considered a vocal divinity, that I finished the romanza without having dared to look her in the face. You

can imagine my surprise, therefore, when she took my face in her hands and kissed me on both cheeks. Afterward in the wings she threw her arms around my neck, exclaiming: 'You 're going to sing in grand opera, and I 'm going to help you.' Adelina Patti's favor and influence did more for me than two years of hard study. There were only two weeks left of the opera season. During that time I appeared twice as Siebel in 'Faust,' and once as the shepherd boy in 'Dinorah.'"

Colonel Mapleson evidently thought that he had made a find, for he offered to send Mrs. Davis to Italy, to give her three years of study with the greatest teachers in the world, every advantage and every opportunity, in short, to become a world-famous singer. In return for these favors Mrs. Davis was to sing under Colonel Mapleson's direction for three years. Personal reasons made it impossible for her to accept this offer, however,

though she did not give up the idea of singing in grand opera. After the birth of her son, Mrs. Davis studied a year with Madame LaGrange in Paris. On her return she sang for a season in W. T. Carleton's company. Her principal parts were the drummer boy in "The Drum Major" and the German girl in "The Merry War." The next season found her in the American Opera Company, which included Fursch-Nadi, Emma Juch, and Pauline L'Allemand, with Theodore Thomas as musical conductor, and the season following that she was with the reorganized National Opera Company.

"That was hard work," remarked Mrs. Davis, "all for no money, and so I got home to Chicago, tired, sick, and discouraged, and vowing that I would never sing in public as long as I lived."

"But you changed your mind?"

"Not immediately. While I was resting in Chicago the manager of The Bostonians

came to see me to talk about an engagement. Agnes Huntington was their contralto, but they wanted to replace her. At first I said 'No!' point blank. I thought nothing would induce me to leave the comfort and seclusion of my home. Then the manager came to see me again, and — well, woman-like I changed my mind."

During her first seasons with The Bostonians, Mrs. Davis's repertory was an extensive one and comprised the Marchioness in "Suzette," Dorothea in "Don Quixote," Cynisca in "Pygmalion and Galatea," Vladimir Samoiloff in "Fatinitza," Siebel in "Faust," Nancy in "Martha," Azucena in "The Troubadour," Carmen in "Carmen," and the Queen of the Gipsies in "The Bohemian Girl." Her great success as Alan-a-Dale in "Robin Hood," brought out at the Grand Opera House in Chicago on June 9, 1890, followed, and this part kept her busy for several seasons. While The Bostonians were on their long hunt —

not yet finished, I believe — for a successor to "Robin Hood," Mrs. Davis appeared in "The Maid of Plymouth," "In Mexico," or, "A War-time Wedding," "The Knickerbockers," "Prince Ananias," and "The Serenade," with its beautiful "Song of the Angelus."

I think it was in 1896 that Mrs. Davis estimated that she had sung "Oh, Promise Me," that popular interpolated song in "Robin Hood," something like five thousand times. "Robin Hood" had received at that time 2041 performances, and she had appeared in it all but twenty-five or thirty of them. "Oh, Promise Me" always got an encore, and often a double encore, which brought the number up to Mrs. Davis's estimate.

"I don't tire so much of the acting of a rôle as I do singing the same words and music night after night," she continued. "I sang 'Oh, Promise Me' until I thought they ought to blow paper wads at me. One day

in Denver I said to our conductor, Sam Studley, 'Sam, I 'm so sick of "Oh, Promise Me" that I've made up mind to sing something else.' 'Jessie,' he said, 'I don't blame you!' So it was agreed that on the following night I would substitute another of DeKoven's sentimental songs. But they would n't have it. I had no sooner commenced singing it than there were shouts from all over the house of 'Oh, Promise Me!' 'We want "Oh, Promise Me!"' I managed to struggle through one verse, and then ran off the stage laughing. Then Mr. Studley struck up the introductory to 'Oh, Promise Me,' and I went back and satisfied the audience by singing their favorite ballad. It's an awful fate to become identified with a single song.

"Being a singer is not like being an actress. If you are a singer, your voice must be your first care. An actress, if she gets over-tired, can go on and spare herself. A singer can-

not. An actress can use less voice at one time than at another. A singer cannot. Now, over-fatigue, excitement, anxiety, all affect the voice by which the singer lives.

"I had my grand opera experience. I was n't very happy in it, although I had good rôles to sing — once in a while. I did not know how to protect myself. I was young then and too good-natured. I confess that while the work in grand opera was more to my taste, I was happier in light opera, and, after all, that is a great thing in the world. Sometimes I used to sigh for more serious work, for a heavier rôle, and in that way 'In Mexico' came to pass. I used to say sometimes 'Oh, I wish I could have a hard part; I am tired of rigging up to show my legs. I want something to do that is hard to do.' So when 'In Mexico' was read they said, 'Well, here 's Mrs. Davis's serious part.'"

That opera was, indeed, very serious, so serious, in fact, that the public would have

nothing to do with it. It was brought out in San Francisco on October 28, 1895. The music was by Oscar Weil and the book by C. T. Dazey, the author of the popular melodrama "In Old Kentucky."

CHAPTER IX

EDNA WALLACE HOPPER

A CAPTIVATING atom of femininity was Edna Wallace when she succeeded Della Fox as the soubrette foil to the DeWolf Hopper's long-leggedness. What a happy girlish smile she had, — her eyes sparkled and danced so merrily, the little dimples in her cheeks were so altogether alluring! Edna Wallace Hopper never was much of a singer, but she was so pretty and so delicate that one never troubled himself about her voice; he was chiefly concerned lest she might thoughtlessly break into bits. She was vivacity itself, vivacity that never seemed noisy nor forced, just the spontaneous expression of natural blithesomeness; and her magnetism could not be escaped. Although she could not

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EDNA WALLACE - HOPPER.

sing, she could act in her soubrettish way, for her little experience on the stage had been spent with plays and not with operas.

The art of the soubrette is about the hardest thing in the world to pin down for examination. In fact, in many cases, the word "art," in connection with the soubrette, is purely conventional; instinct would more correctly describe the means employed by her to gain her stage effects. Dramatic instinct is, of course, the corner-stone of the actor's mental equipment. Indeed, we all have to a degree that involuntary notion what to do under certain circumstances — wholly unexpected circumstances possibly — to create the impression we wish to make. Preachers have it abundantly, or else their words from the pulpit would be ineffective; lawyers are also exceptionally endowed with it, or else their addresses to the jury would be worse than useless; teachers, family physicians, the man who makes politics a profession, all must

have the dramatic instinct to win any great success.

In the case of the soubrette, dramatic instinct is limited in its field. She does not, as a general thing, attempt impersonation, and she never is called upon to do anything more than slightly ruffle the surface of emotional possibilities by a faint appeal to the sentiments. Her dramatic instinct is chiefly concerned in presenting to the best advantage an attractive personality and sparkling temperament backed up by a pretty face and a pleasing figure. Herein lies the difficulty of writing about soubrettes. Having called them happy, gay, graceful, altogether charming, one finds that he has nothing more to say. He cannot talk about their art, for their art is merely themselves, indefinable and impossible of description. He cannot talk about the characters they have played, for they have never played but one, and that themselves. Edna Wallace Hopper's Paquita in "Panjandrum," for ex-

ample, was none other than her Estrelda in "El Capitan." The environment was different and the raiment was different, but the character was the same.

Now a personality cannot be put on paper; it cannot be talked over except in the most superficial and unsatisfactory way. It can only be felt. When one has declared that a certain actor's personality is unusually attractive, he has spoken the last word. Edna Wallace Hopper, in common with all other light opera soubrettes, is a personality. She is there to be liked or disliked just as the notion happens to strike one; but whether one likes or dislikes her, there is no possible ground for an argument about the matter. This person here, who is unmoved by her presence, may claim that she cannot sing and that she is wholly artificial. That person there, who finds her altogether delightful, will declare that he does not care whether she sings or not, and such a dainty creature is

she that her frank artificiality is a positive delight.

Personally I have always found Edna Wallace Hopper exceptionally entertaining. I first bowed the knee before her smile and her coaxing dimples — a great deal of Mrs. Hopper's fascination is smiles and dimples — when she was very new to the stage, and I have never wholly escaped from their thraldom since that time. I acknowledge freely all her shortcomings, — her lack of versatility and resourcefulness, her narrowness of range, — but as long as she keeps her smile and her dimples, I am certain that I shall never be absolutely insensible to her allurements. She is wholly and fixedly a soubrette, a pretty, dancing, laughing creature without a suggestion of seriousness or the slightest trace of emotion. She is not to be studied, and she does not pretend to any depth of illusion. She is an impression, to be admired or scorned always in the present tense.

Edna Wallace was born in San Francisco and was educated at the Vanness Seminary there. It was due entirely to Roland Reed, the light comedian, that the idea of going on the stage ever entered her head. Mr. Reed met Miss Wallace at a reception while he was playing in San Francisco in 1891. She was then not far from seventeen years old. Impressed with her vivacity, he laughingly offered her a position in his company, and, behold! the mischief was done. She accepted quickly; and although her parents did not approve of the plan in the least, she journeyed east during the summer, and in August made her appearance at the Boston Museum with Mr. Reed as Mabel Douglass in "The Club Friend."

Two weeks later she acted in the same play at the Star Theatre in New York, where six weeks later she was given the leading ingénue rôle in "Lend Me Your Wife." She attracted the attention of Charles Frohman, and was

engaged by him, appearing successively as Lucy Mortan in "Jane," Mrs. Patterby in "Chums," Margery in "Men and Women" and as Wilbur's Ann, the boisterous frontier maiden, in "The Girl I Left Behind Me."

It was while she was acting in this play in June, 1893, that she was married to DeWolf Hopper. A few weeks after this, Della Fox, the Paquita in "Panjandrum," was taken suddenly ill and journeyed off to Europe. Mrs. Hopper jumped into the part and played it successfully until the end of the New York season. The following comment on Mrs. Hopper shortly after her first appearance in light opera is interesting: —

"A winsome little woman recently bounded into the affectionate regard of New York audiences at the Broadway Theatre. The severely critical may take occasion to compare her with her predecessor as Paquita in 'Panjandrum,' — possibly to her disadvantage in some instances, — but the fact still remains

that the audiences like her immensely, because she is young, pretty, modest, and because she can act. Edna Wallace Hopper, if not able to sing quite as well as some comic opera performers, is a capable actress, and in this respect her advancement has been somewhat remarkable."

In the fall Mrs. Hopper returned to Charles Frohman's management, but she was not long after released from her contract so that she could assume the part of Merope Mallow in DeWolf Hopper's production of "Dr. Syntax." This was a decidedly attractive bit of work natural and artistic. On the road she also assumed Della Fox's old character of Mataya in "Wang." When "El Capitan" was produced in Boston in April, 1896, she created the part of Estrelda, the hero-worshipping coquette, her first original rôle, by the way, in opera, for her character in "Dr. Syntax" was taken directly from a similar conception in "Cinderella at School." This

was her last rôle with the Hopper organization, for while it was still a popular attraction, domestic difficulties separated her from Mr. Hopper, and she retired from the company at the expiration of her contract with Ben Stevens, the manager.

Mrs. Hopper next appeared in "Yankee Doodle Dandy," an extravaganza of doubtful merit, and with Lillian Russell in a revival of "La Belle Hélène." During the season of 1899–1900, she shared the honors with Jerome Sykes in the extravaganza, "Chris and the Wonderful Lamp," acting the part of the sophisticated youth Chris.

PAULA EDWARDES.

CHAPTER X

PAULA EDWARDES

ONE of the few young and pretty women making a specialty of eccentric comedy parts is Paula Edwardes, a Boston girl, who, starting at the foot of the ladder only a few seasons ago, has quickly claimed a position of prominence in the musical comedy world. Miss Edwardes's most recent characterizations have been two different varieties of the Cockney type in "A Runaway Girl" and "Mam'selle 'Awkins," but previous to that she gave a taste of her ability in this line of impersonation by creating in "The Belle of New York" the rôle of Mamie Clancy, the Bowery girl, a type of character which is nothing more nor less than an Americanized Cockney. I have no idea where Miss Edwardes picked up her weird and wonderful Cockney dialect, unless

she got it during her short visit in London with "The Belle," for she was born and brought up in Boston, where, as every one knows, nothing is spoken except the purest of Emersonian English. Neither will I vouch for the accuracy of Miss Edwardes's importation. However, it sounds English enough, and it is certainly hard enough to understand to be the real thing.

There are two ways of presenting a character study of the uncultivated types of civilized humanity. One is faithfully to imitate the original, sparing not in the least vulgarity, uncouthness, and coarseness. The comedy in this method is the crude product of incongruity and contrast. The second method is merely to retain a recognizable likeness to the original, to tone down the vulgarity, to reduce the uncouthness to a suggestion, and to rely for effect on an heightened sense of humor. There is also introduced in this second method of treatment a subtle, but nevertheless dis-

tinct, self-appreciation of one's own unfitness for polite society and social conventions, — a cynical atmosphere, as it were, that gives the study a touch of satire.

The first method is usually adopted by the unpolished and unthinking actor of variety sketch training, and often, too, by the acrobatic and strictly mechanical comedian of light opera surroundings. It is comedy acting which proves vastly amusing to such as desire their theatrical entertainment as devoid as possible of any intellectual flavor, who do not care to hunt for a fine point, and who are bored by anything that suggests an intelligent appreciation of humor. The comedy of the second method is on a decidedly higher plane. It suggests more than it actually represents. It is more delicate in every way, and it requires a modicum of intelligence on the part of the spectator to be estimated at its full value.

Miss Edwardes's Carmenita in "A Runa-

way Girl" was a genuine characterization. She did more than to array herself in garments of curious pattern, stain her face a gypsy tan and talk a Blackfriars-ish, or alleged Blackfriars-ish dialect, that was wellnigh incomprehensible; she also imparted an individuality to the rôle, and one got from her acting a distinct impression of Carmenita, the woman. Such was the case, too, with her Honorah in "Mam'selle 'Awkins." She evolved, from the precious little material that was given her, a personality. Josephine Hall, on the other hand, let the character go completely by the board, and relied entirely for success on her ability as an entertainer. I will not say which achieved the better results in this particular instance, for the entertainment in which they appeared was too absurd to be considered seriously even as an absurdity. Miss Edwardes, however, adopted the more artistic treatment of the two.

Paula Edwardes went into the theatrical business on the strength of a voice, a face, and a figure, which is simply another way of saying that she began in the chorus. It happened in Boston, and the occasion was the professional production by Thomas Q. Seabrooke of the First Corps of Cadets' extravaganza, "Tobasco." Miss Edwardes was understudy for Elvia Crox, the leading soubrette, and a little luck came the chorus girl's way at the first matinée. Miss Crox declared that she was too ill to play, and Miss Edwardes took her part for the afternoon, succeeding so well that Miss Crox rapidly recovered her health and was able to appear at the evening performance.

Nevertheless, the next season still found Miss Edwardes in the chorus, this time with Hoyt's "A Black Sheep." Again Boston was good to her, for when the company reached that city, Bettina Gerard, who was playing the Queen of Burlesque, was affected by the

climate or something of that kind, threw up her part, and Miss Edwardes was pressed into service in the emergency. Her success was sufficient to put an end for good and all to her chorus experience. The following season Miss Edwardes was in "A Dangerous Maid" with Laura Burt and Madge Lessing, and then she created the part of Mamie Clancy in "The Belle of New York." She went to London with the original company, but after a few months she became tired of the fog and homesick for New York and the familiar surroundings of Broadway and the Rialto. So she resigned from "The Belle" cast and took the next steamer for the United States. Augustin Daly engaged her for Carmenita in "A Runaway Girl," and at the conclusion of the run of that piece in New York she was transferred to "The Great Ruby" in which she made quite a hit as Louise Jupp, the romantically inclined hotel cashier.

In February, 1900, she appeared in "Mam'selle 'Awkins," creating the title rôle, and after that she acted in Boston and New York her old part of Carmenita in "A Runaway Girl."

CHAPTER XI

LULU GLASER

A VERY few years ago Lulu Glaser was known only as "Francis Wilson's new soubrette." That continued for several seasons after she succeeded the fascinating Marie Jansen, — she of the rippling laugh and the form of inscrutable perfection. Lulu Glaser was a bright, sparkling girl in those days of her earlier successes, winsome in personality and as pretty as a picture with her light fluffy hair and her eyes that still retained their girlishness. Her vivacity was remarkable, and her spirits were unflagging. She worked with all her might to please, and she was successful to an unusual degree.

Too bad that those excellent qualities — vivacity, freshness, and unsophisticated youth-

LULU GLASER.

fulness — should have so nearly proved her undoing! Too much kindness on the part of those who wished her only the utmost good, indiscriminate praise and the conventional applausive audience, together with association with Francis Wilson, an excellent comedian in his own line, but not a player who will bear imitation, have brought Miss Glaser to a most critical period in her career. Her personal popularity, it is true, has not suffered as yet, — at least, not to any appreciable extent, — but her reputation as an artist is already on the wane among discriminating judges. She should rank with the very best of our light opera soubrettes, but it would not be true to say that she does.

Miss Glaser's utter lack of any notion of the inherent fitness of things and of her own position as a paid entertainer is shown most conspicuously and most persistently in her exasperating habit of "guying" every performance in which she participates. Here is

a young woman of unquestioned talent both as an actress and a singer, bound down hill simply and solely for the want of restraining good sense and proper discipline. She is much in need of the fatherly advice of a hard-headed stage manager, who would curb that vivacity which has run riot and squelch effectively a condition of cocksureness that is amazing in its effrontery. The trick of "guying" may seem to those on the stage very pretty and highly amusing, but to an audience it is at first surprising, then bewildering, and finally utterly wearisome and disgusting.

The actor, who systematically makes sport on the stage for the benefit of his fellow-players instead of attending to his own business of amusing those who have paid their money for entertainment, commits a breach of artistic etiquette that is wholly inexcusable. The stage is a dangerous place for one to give free rein to personal adoration.

I have known actors who were free from conceit and complete self-satisfaction, but they are comparatively few. Fortunately, however, this generous estimate of one's own attainments does not often, as in Miss Glaser's case, intrude itself into the actor's art. Still, is her condition of mind to be wondered at? She was only a girl when she began to be the subject of kindly notoriety. She was praised, praised, praised, and, worst of all, she was without the restraining influence of a strict disciplinarian.

From desiring above all else to please her audience, and with that end in view, giving lavishly on every occasion the very best that was in her, she developed a frame of mind that conceived her position to be directly opposite to what it really was. She began to feel that the favor was on her side, — that her audience should be grateful to her for taking part in the show. She acquired an atmosphere of condescension and patronage which would

have been ridiculous if it had not been so provoking. This curious attitude was noticeable to a considerable extent in "The Little Corporal;" but it could be endured there, for "The Little Corporal" was, in comparison with the average, an opera not altogether without merit. In "Cyrano de Bergerac," however, that wretched misconception, Miss Glaser's egotism bloomed forth in an astonishing fashion. She was almost below the sphere of serious attention.

It is painful to speak so harshly of a woman naturally so charming as Miss Glaser, whom I would be only too glad to eulogize in rainbow-hued words. I confess that I like her, but that is my weakness. Indeed, if I did not like her, and if I were not convinced of her genuine ability, I should not distress myself to the extent of being honest with her. Sometimes I have even thought that she had a sense of humor until her persistent "guying" knocked the notion out of my head.

"Guying" does not signify a sense of humor. A sense of humor includes, besides the ability to comprehend a joke in a minstrel show, a saving appreciation of the ridiculous in one's self as well as in humanity at large. This quality of looking at one's self from the viewpoint of some one else is rare in man, but it is still rarer in woman. Woman, however, is more expert than man at "faking" a sense of humor.

When Miss Glaser really gets down to business and makes fun wholly for her audience, she is a most entertaining little woman. Her talent for burlesque is unmistakable, although her characters do not always have the atmosphere of spontaneity. Her whole experience having been with Francis Wilson, it is not strange, perhaps, that she should have adopted some of his methods. A comic opera comedian, whose humor is so much a matter of individuality, is the last person in the world to be imitated. In many cases

he is an acquired taste, and almost always he is only conventional, trading on a trick of personality.

Lulu Glaser was born in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, on June 2, 1874, and continued to live there until she joined Francis Wilson's company in 1892.

"I surely inherited no longing for the stage," once remarked Miss Glaser, "for none of my family ever had any professional connection with the theatre. I just had a passionate longing to sing. I talked of it incessantly, and finally father said to mother: 'Let her try it; she will never be satisfied until she does. You go with her to New York, and we shall see what comes of it.' So to New York my mother and I went, and through a friend who knew somebody else who knew Francis Wilson's leader of the orchestra, I got an introduction to this all-important personage.

"Well, I think it was all of a month we had

to wait before the interview could be arranged, and then one eventful day I sang for Mr. de Novellis on the stage of the Broadway Theatre. No, strangely enough, I was n't nervous in the least. The song, I remember, was 'My Lady's Bower;' and when I had finished it, Mr. de Novellis said that he would suggest that I should see Mr. Wilson, — 'the great Wilson,' as I described him in a letter to my father after the first interview. The company was to produce 'The Lion Tamer,' and Mr. Wilson made me understudy to Miss Marie Jansen, meantime giving me a place in the chorus.

"My chance to sing alone came sooner than I anticipated, before I was ready for it, evidently, because on the night when Miss Jansen fell ill, and I was to take her place, I fainted before the curtain went up. But I was not discouraged. 'She is sure to do splendidly now,' said Mr. Wilson, when he heard of that faint. A few months later,

Miss Jansen resigned to become a star, and Mr. Wilson informed me, while I was still in the chorus, that I was to have her place. And he regarded it as the greatest achievement of my life, that for the remaining weeks of the season I never told a soul of what was in store for me."

During her first season Miss Glaser played, besides Angelina in "The Lion Tamer," Lazuli in "The Merry Monarch." Then she tried Javotte in "Erminie," which performance added greatly to her reputation. It is perhaps, the best thing that she has ever done, and certainly bears comparison with the work of other soubrettes in the part. Her next rôle was that of Elverine in "The Devil's Deputy," and from this came still more praise. The rather sedate — for a soubrette — character of Rita in "The Chieftain" was her next exploit. This was what might be termed a "straight" part, and was only given to Miss Glaser after two other rôles had

been assigned to her. "The Chieftain" was produced in the fall of 1895. When Mr. Wilson secured the opera the previous spring, he told Miss Glaser that she was to play Dolly.

"Very well," said she, not in the least surprised, for the rôle was precisely in her line. But she had scarcely begun to plan her conception of the character when somebody discovered that Dolly appeared only in the second and last acts.

"That will never do, you know," said Mr. Wilson. "I tell you what we will do, you must be Juanita, the dancing girl. That is the soubrette part, after all."

"Very well," said Miss Glaser again, with perfect confidence that she would be cast to the best advantage, whatever happened.

The season ended, Miss Glaser went with her mother to their summer home at Sewickley, just out of Pittsburg, and Mr. Wilson sailed for Europe. He saw "The

Chieftain" in London, and at once sent a cablegram to Sewickley: "You are to play Rita." This was indeed a surprise to Miss Glaser, — to be the dignified prima donna of the house bill! It almost took her breath away.

"Do you think I can do it?" she asked Mr. Wilson, when he returned.

"I will stake my reputation on it," was the prompt reply.

So when Sullivan's opera was produced at Abbey's Theatre in New York in September, the public and the critics declared that Mr. Wilson's leading woman was as strong in the "straight" parts as she had proved herself to be in the lighter lines in which she had first won her reputation.

"But, oh, was n't I nervous that first night!" confessed Miss Glaser. "And did n't I pick up the papers the next morning with fear and trembling!"

Miss Glaser, before the run of the opera

was over, however, found her part in "The Chieftain" somewhat hampering, and she was pleased enough when Pierrette in "Half a King" placed her back in the ranks of the joyous and captivating soubrettes. Light-hearted, too, was her part in "The Little Corporal," a rôle which travelled all the way from the long skirts of a court lady to the not too tight trousers of a drummer boy in the French army.

In "The Little Corporal" one could not help but notice how great an influence Mr. Wilson's clowning methods had exercised on Miss Glaser. Mr. Wilson, however, was artistic in his fooling, and was not given to overdoing the thing, which was not strange, for he had been at it a good many years.

Miss Glaser especially worked to the limit the old "gag" popular with variety "artists," of laughing at the jokes on the stage as if they were impromptu affairs gotten up for

her especial benefit. She did it rather well, although she did it too much. Perhaps because the jokes were funny and one laughed at them himself, one liked to think that Miss Glaser — some time before, of course — did see something funny in Mr. Wilson's remarks, and that she laughed at them now because she remembered how she had laughed at them at first. Marie Jansen used to laugh, too, when she was with Mr. Wilson, and her laugh was a wonderful achievement, — a thing of ripples, quavers, and gurgles. And this coincidence suggests a horrible thought. Possibly Mr. Wilson himself was to blame for these laughs. Possibly he stipulated in the bond that his soubrettes should laugh early and often at his jokes as a cue to the audience. In the early scenes of "The Little Corporal," regardless of laughs and all else, Miss Glaser was captivating, and her first song — it was something about a coquette, as I re-

call it — was a fetching bit of descriptive singing.

During the season of 1899–1900, Miss Glaser played Roxane in "Cyrano de Bergerac," and Javotte in "Erminie."

CHAPTER XII

MINNIE ASHLEY

ARTLESS girlishness, remarkable personal charm, and skill as an imaginative dancer scarcely equalled on the American stage, account for Minnie Ashley's sudden success in musical comedy. Aside from her dancing, which is artistic in every sense, she is by no means an exceptionally talented young woman. Nature was indeed good to her when it endowed her with a most fascinating personality, a pretty, piquant face, and a slim, graceful figure, but it was by no means lavish with other gifts most desirable. Miss Ashley's range as an actress is decidedly limited; she is not to the slightest degree versatile, and she has no notion at all of the art of impersonation. Her singing voice is

more of an imagination than a reality, although one is sometimes deceived into believing that she can sing in a modest way by the admirable skill with which she uses the little voice that is hers. She has a due regard for its limitations, and she delights one by the clearness of her enunciation and the expressive daintiness of her interpretation of the simple ballads that show her at her best.

Nothing could be more exquisitely charming than her art in such songs as "The Monkey on the Stick" and "The Parrot and the Canary" in "The Geisha," "A Little Bit of String" in "The Circus Girl," and "I'm a Dear Little Iris" and "This Naughty Little Maid" in "A Greek Slave." These songs are all of the same class, — little humorous narratives, or, better yet, funny stories set to music. Miss Ashley seems almost to recite them, so perfectly understandable is every word, yet she keeps to the tune at the same time. Not a point in the story

is overlooked, and every phase of meaning is captivatingly illustrated in pantomime. Miss Ashley's pantomime, like her acting, is limited in quantity; so limited, in fact, that it suggests, after one becomes familiar with it, the fear that it is all mannerism. Even at that, I doubt if any one can escape its persuasive appeal, can remain absolutely cold and unresponsive before those eyes so full of roguish innocence, those lips smiling a challenge, and that pretty bobbing head shaking a negative that means yes.

However, if he be unmoved by Miss Ashley's singing, he surely cannot resist her dancing. It is as an illustrative dancer that Miss Ashley is supreme. She is the one woman who comprehends dancing as something more than violent physical exercise, who appreciates the art of dancing in its classic sense as a means of symbolic and poetic expression. Minnie Ashley dances with her whole body moving in perfect unity

and in perfect rhythm. She is the personification of grace from head to foot, and there is vivacity and joy and fulness of life in the saucy noddings of her head, the languorous sway of her form, the sinuous wavings of her arms and hands, and the bewildering mingling of billowy draperies and flashy, twinkling feet. When Minnie Ashley kicks, she does so delicately and deliberately, — kicks that end with a shiver and quiver of the toe-tips.

It has been Miss Ashley's good fortune in most of her parts to be permitted to dance in long skirts. As Gwendolyn in "Prince Pro Tem," however, she wore the conventional soubrette skirt of knee length. It was surprising what a handicap it was to the full effectiveness of her dancing. Miss Ashley is not a whirlwind dancer; she does not sacrifice grace for speed, nor dignity for astounding contortions of the body. Knowing full well the value of the artistic repose and the

crowning fascination of suggestion, she handles her draperies with that rare skill which makes them seem a part of herself. Their sweeping softness destroys all crude outlines, and they are at the same time tantalizing provokers of curiosity. The short skirt — blunt, plain-spoken, and tactless — compelled the substitution of abandon for sensuousness, and consequently a sacrifice of coquetry and suggestiveness.

Minnie Ashley was born in Fall River, Massachusetts, in 1875. Her family name was Whitehead. When she was very young her father and mother separated, her mother going to Boston and taking Minnie with her. The mother afterward was married to a man by the name of Ashley, and it was as Minnie Ashley that the dainty actress was always known during her girlhood in Boston. She lived and went to school both in Roxbury and the South End; and she learned her first dancing steps, as thousands of city children

do, by tripping away on the sidewalk to the grinding music of the hand-organ.

Her first appearances in public were made at the children's festivals on Washington's birthday in the old Music Hall, Boston. The first year she was the Queen of the Fairies with a number of other school-children as subjects; and the next year, after demonstrating that she could dance, she was promoted to the position of solo dancer, and a feature of the entertainment was her exposition of the intricacies of "The Sailor's Hornpipe." Her native talent, so prettily shown at these children's festivals, attracted the attention of a teacher of dancing, who took Miss Minnie under her charge and gave the child the instruction that was necessary to develop her gifts to the best advantage.

During the summer the teacher took her promising pupil to the summer resorts in the White Mountains. There the guests were charmed, and the boys and girls of ambitious

parents were instructed in the art Terpsichorean. This lasted until Miss Minnie came to the conclusion that she was doing all the work while her companion was reaping most of the profits. So they quarrelled about it and separated, Miss Ashley returning to Boston firmly resolved to go upon the stage as a professional dancer.

At that time Edward E. Rice was organizing a company to produce the R. A. Barnet spectacle, "1492," and to him Miss Ashley applied. She succeeded in getting a place in the chorus. When DeWolf Hopper brought out "El Capitan" in Boston in 1896, she was still in the chorus, although she was permitted to understudy Edna Wallace Hopper. Miss Ashley, however, had developed since the days of "1492," and although she was in the chorus, she was by no means of the chorus. Her individuality was so pronounced, her magnetism so potent, that the largest chorus could not conceal her. She literally stood

forth from the group, a graceful and beautiful figure, animated, interesting, and pertly captivating. She had something of the spirit of France about her, or at least what we think is the spirit of France; and it was not altogether strange, therefore, that her first engagement outside the chorus should have been to act a French girl. This occurred in a musical comedy called "The Chorus Girl," which was brought out at the Boston Museum after the close of the regular season in 1898. "The Chorus Girl" was pretty poor stuff, but Miss Ashley's personal success was considerable.

The following season J. C. Duff put "The Geisha" and "The Circus Girl" on the road, and Miss Ashley played Mollie Seamore in "The Geisha" and Dolly Wemyss in "The Circus Girl." In May, 1899, when "Prince Pro Tem," a musical comedy by R. A. Barnet and L. S. Thompson, which has never played a successful engagement outside of Boston,

was revived, Miss Ashley appeared as Gwendolyn. Those who heard Josie Sadler sing "If I could only get a Decent Sleep" in "Broadway to Tokio," may be interested to know that this touching ballad was originally one of the chief hits of "Prince Pro Tem." "Prince Pro Tem," with its numerous deficiencies, had one thoroughly artistic character, Tommy Tompkins, the showman. Fred Lenox acted the part; and a capital bit of comedy it was, too, deliciously humorous in its depreciating self-sufficiency, wonderfully clever as a loving and sympathetic caricature, and thoroughly convincing as a sincere study of human nature, a Thackeray-like creation, which was worthy of a more pretentious setting than it received in Mr. Barnet's show.

When "A Greek Slave" was produced in New York in November, 1899, that city discovered Minnie Ashley and forthwith shouted her name from the housetops. "A Greek

Slave" was not a success, but Miss Ashley's Iris was. As the "New York Telegram" said: —

"And there is Minnie Ashley. A slim, graceful, attractive young woman, with scarcely the suggestion of her wonderful magnetic power in her slender outlines. Two minutes after she had made her entrance, the house was hers and all that therein was. She could n't sing in the same country with Dorothy Morton. She could n't act in a manner to warrant attention on that score — and she knew it, and did n't make any harrowing attempts to reach what was beyond her. She knew herself. There was part of the secret. She did n't endeavor to gather in impossibilities. She simply came out and played with that audience as a little child would play with a roomful of kittens. 'You may purr over me and lick my hand and look at me with your great, appreciative eyes,' she told her kittens, 'and

in return, I will stroke you and soothe you, and charm you.'

"And she certainly did charm that house. She has a pleasing little voice which she uses with utmost judiciousness. She has an innate grace and refinement that are most telling accomplishments. As she informed us in her opening song, 'I 'm a Dear Little Iris,' a slave girl, who knows how to drape herself and how to execute the steps of the airiest, fairiest dances. There have been many times at the Metropolitan Opera House when great singers have been overwhelmed by the fierce applause of an emotional audience. Then the bravos have been shouted and the enthusiasm has reached a fever pitch. But before last night these scenes have formed no part of the programme at the Herald Square. Miss Ashley changed that old order, and changed it with the lightness and lack of perceptible effort which characterized her whole performance. The house simply went wild

over this practically unknown girl. Her name was called again and again, and the encores of her pretty little songs stretched the opera out far beyond its legitimate length. The house admired the daintiness, the womanliness, and the suggestion of the thorough-bred in this young girl. The poise of her head, the poetical motion of her body, the total lack of self-consciousness, these were constant delights."

"To Minnie Ashley," declared the "Boston Transcript," a few weeks later, when "A Greek Slave" was played in Boston, "fell nine-tenths of the honors of the performance, and she gave another impersonation fully as charming as those with which she has been associated in 'The Geisha,' 'The Circus Girl,' and 'Prince Pro Tem.' She was a dainty little slave, demure as was befitting the character, but with a way that was certainly irresistible. She is a real comédienne, and each of the points in the few funny lines that fell to her

lot was capitally brought out. Especially clever was the song about 'The Naughty Little Girl' in the second act, where she made the hit of the evening. Nature never intended her to be a prima donna, but it gave her the power to sing a song like that in a way that leaves nothing to be desired, and when she dances — well, it does n't matter in what language she dances; Latin, Japanese or Yankee, the result is just the same."

While she was with DeWolf Hopper, Miss Ashley was married to William Sheldon, a half-brother of Walter Jones, from whom she was afterward separated.

CHAPTER XIII

EDNA MAY

A PRETTY face and a gentle, winning personality brought Edna May into prominence in the most dramatic fashion. Edna May Petty, the daughter of E. C. Petty, a letter-carrier in Syracuse, New York, lovely to look upon and demure in manner, had some talent for singing, but more for dancing, when her parents yielded to her entreaties and said that she might go to New York to study for the stage. She was only sixteen years old. Hardly had she settled down to her singing and dancing lessons, however, when along came Fred Titus, at that time the holder of the hour bicycle record and one of the most prominent racing men in the country. They were married, but Edna May remained just

as determined as ever to go on the stage. Her ambitions were forced for a time to be satisfied with occasional opportunities to substitute in church choirs. Her name first appeared on a playbill when "Santa Maria" was produced at Hammerstein's in New York, but the part was so small as to be practically non-existent. Then she was engaged for White's Farcical Comedy Company and appeared in Charles H. Hoyt's "A Contented Woman."

At this point there is a dispute as regards Miss May's next move, or at least there was a dispute until manager and star patched up their difficulties. George W. Lederer was wont to claim that Edna May joined the chorus of his prospective "The Belle of New York" company. At the last moment, the woman whom he had engaged for leading part disappointed him. He had to do something quickly, and he cast about in his own chorus for a girl who might fill the part

for a night or two until he could find someone to take it permanently. His discerning eye fell on the plaintive prettiness of Edna May. "She'll look the part, anyhow," he declared. So in this haphazard fashion, Violet Grey, the Salvation Army lassie, was passed over to her, and, presto! her fortune was made.

"But it was not that way at all," pouted the gentle Miss May, after she had signed a contract to leave Mr. Lederer and return to London under some one else's care. "I never was in Mr. Lederer's chorus. I went to Mr. Lederer after I had been playing a small part in the 'Contented Woman' company. I begged him to put my name down for something even if it were ever and ever so little, and he gave me the part of Violet Grey in 'The Belle.'"

At this time, also, — this period devoted by Miss May to the signing of the contracts, which never amounted to anything, after all,

—a second dispute arose regarding Miss May's indebtedness to Mr. Lederer for her success in "The Belle." Mr. Lederer announced to a deeply impressed public that he had trained Miss May with the most extraordinary attention to detail. He had made her walk chalk-lines on the stage, and had written on the music-score minute directions regarding gestures, even indicating the exact point where she was captivatingly to cast down her eyes.

"No, no, no," declared Miss May. "All that is very unkind and very untrue. He did not teach me all or nearly all I know about my art, and he did not have to write out gestures and full directions for my conduct on the stage. Not one word of this sort of thing was written in the score. Mr. Lederer rehearsed me, it is true, but not as if he were rehearsing a performing seal. He gave me an opportunity, and for that I am very grateful. But that is all he did. I am not such a

fool as Mr. Lederer is always pretending to think me."

However, regarding Miss May's extraordinary popular success in "The Belle of New York" in this country, and more especially in London, there can be no dispute. That is a fact discernible without opera glasses. It was, however, almost wholly a triumph of personality. Violet Grey is what actors call a "fat" part. The Salvation Army lassie, a quaint, subdued, almost pathetic figure, thrown in the midst of the contrasting hurly-burly and theatrical exaggerations of a typical musical farce, appeals irresistibly to the spectator's sympathy. She touches deftly the sentiments, for in her modest way she is a bit of real life, a touch of human nature, in surroundings where the men and women of every-day life are complete strangers.

But Violet Grey is not a rôle to be acted. It is not, in the strictest sense, a dramatic character at all, merely a picture from life, set

forth without comment and without exposition. One sees all that there is to see, the instant Violet Grey appears on the scene; he recognizes at once her reality and her fidelity to nature, and he falls a victim to her charm without further ado. The actress cast for this part must in a sense live it. She must, as Mr. Lederer said, "look the part;" she must suggest at a glance, modesty, demureness, quaintness, spirituality, and idealism. Coquetry, any notion of archness or frivolity, must be rigorously banished. There her responsibility practically ends, for folded hands, cast-down eyes, and the ability to sing a little do the rest.

Success in such a part as Violet Grey affords not the slightest test of artistic ability, and Edna May's artistic future is still a matter of doubt. She has appeared in only one operetta aside from "The Belle," — "An American Beauty," brought out in London by an American company in April, 1900.

The remarkable feature of Miss May's career was the furore that she created in London, where, due as much to her personal popularity as to any other one thing, "The Belle of New York" ran for eighty-five weeks. It was wonderful, when one thinks of it, that sweet simplicity could do so much. Of course, when Miss May returned to this country in January, 1900, she had many pleasant remarks to make about the Londoners. Speaking of the opening night, she said:

"I played the part during the long run in the United States, so I was very used to it, and there was nothing out of the ordinary about the first night in London, until the sensation caused by their tremendous applause came to me. There is nothing like it, nothing that approaches it. It is quite the most delicious sensation on earth. I don't expect ever to feel it again quite as I did that night. It's like the first kiss, you know, or the first anything. After that it's only repetition.

"Success was particularly sweet to me at that time, but it was something of a shock. I was n't looking for such a reception. They not only applauded, they shouted and deluged me with flowers. The next day I found myself talked about everywhere. I had done nothing but be natural, and do my best, yet they praised my talent. They kept my rooms flower-laden; they sent me rich gifts, and what was more, — oh, a great deal more, — they held out to me the hand of friendship, men and women alike, and made me one of them.

"There is one of the most marked differences between London and New York. Here a girl who enters the profession is ostracized; there it is considered an added charm. Here if a girl of any social position chooses a stage career, it must be at a great personal sacrifice. There, whatever social prestige she may have will be an aid to her in her professional ambitions. One of the greatest helps to me

in London was the way the genuine people of the aristocracy opened their doors to me, and made me welcome in their lives and homes. For my own part, I did not know that it was possible for so much happiness to come to a single life as I have realized during the past two years abroad."

CHAPTER XIV

MARIE CELESTE

ALMOST as necessary as a singing voice to the young woman who would venture into light opera and musical comedy, are physical attractiveness and personal magnetism. An unusually good voice, daintiness of face and figure, and a winsome personality Marie Celeste has, and she has one other quality which to me makes her work on the stage especially enjoyable. That is her total lack of affectation. When one sees her he is not conscious of that irritating screen of artificiality that so often darkens and sometimes hides completely the personality on the stage. An actor, to be effective, must show a personality of some sort. It may not be his own, but it should appear to be his own. The ability,

under the conditions represented in the theatre, to convince an audience that the personality represented is a real personality constitutes that branch of acting known as impersonation.

Actors try to accomplish this deception by various means. They bring to their aid wonderful skill in make-up and astonishing ingenuity in pantomime; but these external devices fail, every one of them, to produce the impression desired, unless the final effect on the mind of the person to be convinced is one of simplicity and sincerity. To create this impression of simplicity and sincerity, the actor must project his character mentally as well as reproduce it physically; he must appeal to the mind as well as to the eye; he must know human nature; he must study and experiment, and he must have the dramatic temperament.

Simplicity and sincerity of this kind are none too common on the stage, and espe-

cially is one not apt to find them among the men and women who interpret any form of opera. There are two simple reasons for this. One is that the operatic singer who has a chance to study naturally enough seeks first of all to improve the voice on which he is so dependent. Acting he regards as something that can be quickly acquired from the ubiquitous stage manager. The second reason is that, even in the case of singers who can act, the artificiality of the operatic scheme — drama united with music — is bound to affect the player's art. The player in opera acts, not as men and women act, but as operatic tenors or sopranos or bassos have acted ever since opera came into being. In fact, we have become so accustomed to strutting tenors and mincing sopranos that we accept what they have to offer as a matter of course. If only they sing well and their inherent artificiality be not too ridiculous, we are satisfied.

Yet when spontaneity and conviction are present, what a change in conditions they cause! They make opera — even the frivolous opera of the hardworking Harry B. Smith, who has what William J. Henderson calls the "operetta libretto habit" — seem real. One does not have to adopt the intended illusion by a sort of free-will process; it is forced on him.

Marie Celeste is one of the few actresses in opera. She has spontaneity and conviction, simplicity and sincerity, and in particular refreshing and unconscious naïveté. Her personality is attractive, winsome, and thoroughly feminine, and her style is vivacious, sparkling, and refined. Her voice is a high soprano of considerable power, and might easily of itself have won her a place on the operatic stage. As a matter of fact, however, her greatest successes have been in parts where singing was something of a secondary consideration. Both physically and temperament-

ally, Miss Celeste is best fitted for soubrette rôles, parts that require appreciative humor, girlish charm, and artistic finish, ability to dance, and some pretensions as a ballad singer. Miss Celeste's dancing is dainty and graceful, without physical violence, and with a hint of the poetry of motion that makes dancing something more than an athletic feat.

As Winnifred Grey in "A Runaway Girl" — a part in which personal charm counted for a great deal — Miss Celeste made a splendid impression largely through her ability as an actress. The music of the part was too low to show her voice to the best advantage, yet she sang the fetching "The Boy Guessed Right the Very First Time" song more effectively than any one I have ever heard. It is, of course, a simple enough ditty, which, however, demands considerable finesse, suggestive action, and a strain of humor to make it go as it should. The sentiment that she put into the second verse of the catchy little

duet, "I Think 'twould Break my Heart," was exquisitely delicate and true. Except for a pretty moment at the end of the first act, there is little else than these two bits in the part, aside from an attractive monotony of brightness and happiness; and brightness and happiness, of course, are directly in the line of every musical comedy girl.

Marie Celeste — her full name is Marie Celeste Martin — was born and brought up in New York City. So far as she knows, she was the first one of her family to go upon the stage. In fact, from her mother she inherited a strain of Quaker blood, which certainly would never have countenanced a theatrical career. Her mother's grandfather, however, was a Frenchman, and from him probably came her artistic temperament. He was a bit of an inventor in his way, though apparently not a very practical one, a man who dreamed of great things, but like Cotta in "The Schönberg-Cotta Family" failed to

bring them to an issue in time to reap any material benefit. Of an original turn of mind and a sanguine temperament, he experimented with many inventions from which he expected to derive fortune and fame. None of them amounted to anything, however.

Marie's father died when she was a girl studying music in the New York Conservatory, and she was obliged to look about for a means whereby to earn her livelihood. For some time she had thought of the stage, — say rather idly speculated regarding it as a possibility without ever really believing that she would sometime adopt it as her life-work. Naturally, therefore, it was to the stage that she turned at this time of adversity. Her ambition was opera. She knew that she had a voice, but she also knew that she could not act. With rare foresight in one so young, she made up her mind that the first thing for her to do was to learn to act, and she pluckily took an engagement in a stock

company at Halifax, Nova Scotia. That was in 1890, and her first part was Fantile, the maid in Ben Teal's melodrama, "The Great Metropolis."

"Mr. Teal, whom afterward I came to know very well, and I have often laughed over that," said Miss Celeste. "But it was hard work in that stock company. We changed the bill twice a week, and sometimes now I think how often I have sat with a dressmaker on one side of me and my part in a chair near my elbow on the other side, memorizing my lines while I sewed away for dear life on my costumes."

Miss Celeste steadily gained in skill as an actress, and was given characters of increasing importance. She went with the company to Portland; and when she announced that she was going to leave the organization and look for an opening in opera, she was offered the position of leading woman as an inducement to stay.

After Miss Celeste returned to New York, she studied singing for a time, and then was engaged for the farce comedy, "Hoss and Hoss," which exploited Charles Reed, now dead, and Willie Collier, who is at present emulating the example of Nat Goodwin and trying to make himself over into a legitimate comedian. The company opened at the Hollis Street Theatre in Boston, on January 12, 1892, and Miss Celeste's character was Polly Hoss. It was not really a character though, only a name, and she was engaged not to act, but to sing. Everybody in the company thought that she was a beginner, and she did not tell her associates how she had barely escaped being leading lady of a two-bills-a-week stock-company.

"Hoss and Hoss" was a typical farce comedy of the Charles H. Hoyt school, — a plotless, formless thing, which was no play, but a vehicle. The chief object of the person that conceived it was to get every person in

the company on the stage at the same time, toward the end of the third act. When this remarkable artistic feat was accomplished, a leading personage in the cast would remark with elaborate casualness: —

"Seeing we're all here and looking so well, suppose we have a little music."

Forthwith every one on the stage fell into the nearest chair in a helpless sort of a way, as if life were a veritable snare and delusion, and the master of ceremonies continued: —

"Miss Jones, will you kindly favor us with that beautiful ballad entitled 'Way Down upon the Swanee River?'"

And so they began, and thus they continued, until every one on the stage had his chance to air his talent before a highly entertained assemblage. It was not exactly a minstrel show, but it approached the minstrel territory. On the bill it was called the "olio."

Miss Celeste's part in the "olio" was to

sing a ballad; and as no one knew anything about her, she was placed almost at the end of the list of entertainers. When she came to talk with Frank Palmer, the musical director of the company, he asked her what song she had chosen. She told him, and then he wanted to know what she was going to give as an encore.

"You know," said Miss Celeste, in telling me the story, "I was n't very old, and I was n't very big, and I was terribly nervous, and just a little frightened. I knew what I intended to sing, but it took all the courage I had to murmur gently, 'I 'd like to sing, "Coming Thro' the Rye."'

"Never shall I forget the expression of disgust on Mr. Palmer's face.

"'I 'll rehearse you, anyway,' was all he said.

"But I did n't tell him that I had taken a little advantage of him. As a matter of fact, I had sung 'Coming Thro' the Rye' in Halifax, in

a part which required a song, and in which the old melody seemed appropriate. I knew I could make a success of it.

"We went on with the rehearsals, — Mr. Palmer and I, — and he was very kind and considerate after he heard me sing, transposed the music to a higher register, so as to show my voice to better advantage, and gave me any number of little points. When it was all arranged, he said: —

"'Now promise me one thing. Promise that you won't tell any one in the company what you are going to sing.'

"I promised. I suppose he was afraid that some one of them would make fun of me.

"'And you won't flunk, will you?' he added.

"'No,' I said, 'I won't flunk.'

"On the first night," continued Miss Celeste, "'Coming Thro' the Rye' brought me four or five recalls, and consequently

after that the stage manager gave me a much better place in the 'olio.' That is the reason I call 'Coming Thro' the Rye' my mascot."

After her farce comedy experience, Miss Celeste became a member of Lillian Russell's opera company, appearing as Paquita in "Giroflé-Girofla," Petita in "The Princess Nicotine," and Wanda in "The Grand Duchess." During the season of 1894–95 she was with Della Fox in "The Little Trooper," singing the part of Octavie most charmingly, and acting as understudy to Miss Fox, whose rôle she played many times. The next season she returned to Miss Russell's company, making so effective as to attract considerable attention the trifling part of Ninetta in "The Tzigane." She also sang Gaudalena in "La Perichole," and the Duchess de Paite in "The Little Duke."

Miss Celeste was taken seriously ill in March, 1896, and her work during the following season was necessarily not very heavy.

Under the management of Klaw and Erlanger she appeared as the Queen in "The Brownies," in which, by the way, she again sang "Coming Thro' the Rye;" and the following summer she made a decided hit as Peone Burn in the lively spectacle, "One Round of Pleasure." Mistress Mary in "Jack and the Beanstalk" followed, and then she succeeded Christie MacDonald as Minutezza in "The Bride Elect." Her last part was Winnifred Grey in "A Runaway Girl."

Miss Celeste has also sung leading parts with the Castle Square Opera Company, under Henry W. Savage's management, in New York, and for a brief season in Boston. Her principal part with this organization was Santuzza in "Cavalleria Rusticana."

"I suppose Mr. Savage thought I looked the part," said Miss Celeste, "and so he asked me to study it. I was really frightened at the idea. I told him that I had never tried anything heavy like Santuzza, and that

tragedy was not in my line. He insisted that I attempt it, however, and so I did the best I could. I got into the part far better than I believed were possible, and the result surprised me. I don't think I could do anything with a rôle that runs the gamut of emotions, as they say. But Santuzza is all in one key, a perfect whirlwind, and after you once strike the pace she fairly carries you along with her own impetuosity.

"What is the most enjoyable part I ever had?" said Miss Celeste, repeating my question. "That's easily answered: Mataya in 'Wang,' which I played during a summer engagement, just before DeWolf Hopper went to England. He 's such a dear boy,— Mataya, I mean, — thinks he is so very sporty when he is n't at all, and then he 's so very much in love. I was very fond of that boy.

"I think there is a fascination about boys' parts, anyway. It is something of a study to do them just right, to be feminine and still

not to be effeminate. An old stage manager once said to me, 'Be sure you please the women. That will bring them to the theatre, and they will bring the men.' The difficulty in playing boys is to please the women, and at the same time to keep your boy from being a poor, weak, colorless creature. One must never overstep the line of womanliness in seeking masculinity, and she must still make the character a real boy and not a girl disguised as a boy."

CHAPTER XV

CHRISTIE MACDONALD

AFTER eight years of soubrette experience Christie MacDonald unexpectedly came into prima donnaship in February, 1900. A light opera called "The Princess Chic," book by Kirke LaShelle and music by Julian Edwards, had been living a quiet life at the Columbia Theatre, Boston, for several weeks. For some reason or other it did not seem to go just as it should. It was a good opera at that — much better than the average. Mr. LaShelle's book told a story with a genuine dramatic climax, and Mr. Edwards's music was charming, — simple but melodious. There was action enough apparently, but the performance dragged. It lacked snap and vigor.

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CHRISTIE MACDONALD.

The prima donna rôle in this opera was one of great difficulty. It demanded an actress as well as a singer, — a woman who could be swaggering, audacious, and masculinely incisive as the Princess, masquerading as her own envoy, timid, modest, and shrinkingly feminine as the make-believe peasant girl, and finally queenly and royal as the Princess in her proper person. The plot of "The Princess Chic," by the way, paralleled history in a curious manner, and the story of how it was written was told me by Mr. LaShelle: —

"To begin with," said he, "'The Princess Chic' was not taken from the French, though there was a French vaudeville with the same title. I got the idea of the opera fixed in my mind after seeing Henry Irving play 'Louis XI.' during one of his visits to this country. You remember in that drama where the envoy from the Duke of Burgundy and his clanking guard march into Louis's presence.

The envoy throws his mailed gauntlet at Louis's feet and exclaims, 'That is the answer of Charles the Bold!' or words to that effect, at any rate.

"That kindled my admiration for Charles the Bold, and I have been admiring him ever since. Consequently when I wanted a comic opera and could n't get any one to write it for me, I said to myself, 'Here 's a chance for Charles the Bold.' I forthwith started in on what is now the second act of 'The Princess Chic,' and wrote backward and forward.

"Now comes the odd part of the whole business. I had to have a woman for my opera, so I invented the Princess Chic. I had to have a plot, — I 'm a bit old-fashioned, I know, — so I invented the intrigue of Louis XI. plotting to cause a revolt among the subjects of the Duke of Burgundy. I seemed to be getting along first-rate when it occurred to me that it would n't do any harm to delve a bit into history. So I delved.

"You can imagine my astonishment when I found that I had unwittingly been duplicating to a startling extent historical fact. I discovered that there actually had been a Princess Chic. I learned that Louis XI. had thought to cause trouble in Charles's domain, and by this means to open a way for the seizure of that province for France. The Duke's bold move in arresting the King and holding him captive until the King agreed to a treaty that suited Charles was new to me, however, and I grabbed it quick.

"Now you have the whole story of 'The Princess Chic.' Somebody has accused me of coquetting with history. I deny all coquetry. 'The Princess Chic' is to all intents and purposes genuine history, much nearer fact than many a historical drama that makes more pretences of sticking closely to the truth."

However, history or no history, the opera did not act as it should, and Mr. LaShelle decided to try what the effect of a new prima

donna would be. He wanted Camille d'Arville, but she was not available; and by some marvellous stroke of good fortune he hit upon Christie MacDonald. How he happened to do it is a mystery. Christie MacDonald was, of course, well known as a very amiable little lady with a decided fancy for short skirts and for frisky and vivacious characters, that sang prettily and danced nimbly. Never for a moment had she been associated with the dignified prima donna. Nor had she ever been guilty of seriousness. Moreover, if the whole truth were to be told, her voice — though sweet, delicate, musical, and skilfully controlled — was by no means strong. Decidedly Christie MacDonald had other things besides a voice to make her attractive. There was her personality, magnetically feminine, her temperament, so sunshiny and happy, and her face, not exactly pretty, but immensely attractive when fun lighted it up with smiles.

Therefore Christie MacDonald's Princess Chic came as a great surprise. At first, she was apparently feeling her way in the rôle. She was, in fact, a model of discretion, but save in one particular her acting lacked force and conviction. As the peasant girl, in this three-sided impersonation, she was from the first exquisite. Never was the subtle attack of a modest maiden upon a susceptible man's heart more daintily or more fascinatingly exhibited. Under every circumstance Miss MacDonald was simple and straightforward in her methods, and absolutely free from affectation and self-consciousness. How thoroughly delightful that is! Singers, in particular, are the victims of conventional mannerisms, smiles that are meaningless and as a result expressionless, curious contortions with the eyes, and strange movements of the hands. How much they would gain by mastering the difficult art of artistically doing nothing!

With so much that was good in evidence during her earliest presentations of the Princess Chic, with her faults those of omission rather than commission, it was only natural that Miss MacDonald should improve greatly as she became thoroughly familiar with the requirements of the part, and as she gained experience in acting it. Especially did she seem to catch the spirit of the Princess Chic masquerading as the handsome young envoy. She developed a most entrancing swagger and the most captivating nonchalance. Her voice, too, which at first seemed almost too light for Mr. Edwards's trying music, was heard to a much better advantage later; and in spite of its want of volume, it had a strange insistency, a peculiar penetrating quality, which enabled it to balance admirably the full chorus in the ensemble climaxes.

Before she adopted the stage professionally, Christie MacDonald gained a little experience by taking small parts in several

summer "snap" companies in her home city of Boston. Her parents were not altogether pleased at her theatrical aspirations, and even after she had been enrolled in 1892 as a member of Pauline Hall's company, she was persuaded to give up the engagement in deference to their wishes. Just at this critical point in her career, however, she chanced to meet Francis Wilson, who had "The Lion Tamer" in rehearsal. He heard her sing and liked her voice so well that he offered her a place in his company. The temptation was too strong to be resisted, and Miss MacDonald established herself under the Wilson banner. At first she was given only a small part in "The Lion Tamer," and at the same time understudied Lulu Glaser in both "The Lion Tamer" and "The Merry Monarch." The next season she played Marie, the peasant girl, in "Erminie," and during Miss Glaser's illness, Javotte. When "The Devil's Deputy" was brought out for

the season of 1894–95, she created the rôle of Bob, the valet. She was a capital Mrs. Griggs in the pretty Sullivan opera, "The Chieftain," her singing of the topical song, "I Think there is Something in That," being especially popular. During the summer of 1896 she appeared in Boston in "The Sphinx," making a pleasing impression as Shafra. The following fall found her again with the Francis Wilson forces, playing Lucinde in "Half a King." That summer she filled another engagement in Boston as the Japanese maiden Woo Me, in the not-too-successful opera, "The Walking Delegate." It was a dainty part and charmingly done.

The next season Miss MacDonald was engaged by Klaw and Erlanger for the Sousa opera, "The Bride Elect," with which she remained two seasons, and this was followed by her appearance in "The Princess Chic."

MARIE DRESSLER.

CHAPTER XVI

MARIE DRESSLER

ONE cannot see Marie Dressler on the stage without being convinced that she is acting no one in the world but herself. Such, I believe, is the actual condition of affairs, although there are sometimes strange paradoxes in theatrical life. It would not be altogether extraordinary for the rollicking tomboy of the stage to be in private life the most retired and the most dignified person imaginable, a woman with spinster written all over her face and reeking in domesticity, with a decided fondness for tea, toast, and tidies.

However, that is not the case with Marie Dressler. She has a mental quirk that keeps the incongruous side of life in her view practically all the time. She cannot help pricking

constantly the bubble of mirth any more than she can help breathing. Her humor is just the kind that one would naturally expect to find as a companion to her overflowing physique, — ponderous, weighty, and a bit crude, perhaps, but spontaneous, real, and thoroughly good-natured. She never stabs with the keen shaft of cynical wit, and she does no business in the epigram market. Her specialty is incongruity, for Marie Dressler is a burlesquer in thought, word, and deed, and being a burlesquer she is of necessity absolutely without illusions. When one is so susceptible to the oddities, the inconsistencies, and the tragic pettiness of human affairs as she is, it is a toss-up whether or not his settled condition of mind, after a fair experience with the world, be one of gloomy pessimism or irresponsible optimism. Had Miss Dressler been by nature cold, suspicious, and inherently selfish, had she been unsympathetic and without the milk of human kindness, her

instinct for incongruity would surely have turned her toward misanthropy. Her disposition, however, was rollicking, jovial, and fun-loving. She was naturally impulsive, generous, and warm-hearted. Consequently, life, even in its smallnesses and its meannesses, made her laugh. With the humorist's whimsical temperament she united also the happy faculty of being able to communicate to others by means of the theatre her comical view of things. Choosing to do this through the force of her own personality rather than by infusing her personality into a dramatist's conception, she became a droll, a professional jester.

Miss Dressler's best-known and most characteristic work on the stage was done in the rôle of the boisterous music-hall singer, Flo Honeydew, in "The Lady Slavey." It was hardly a case of acting, — better call it a case of letting herself go. Marie Dressler without subterfuge presented herself in the guise of

the unconventional Miss Honeydew. She seemed a big, overgrown girl and a thoroughly mischievous romp with the agility of a circus performer and the physical elasticity of a professional contortionist.

To call her graceful would be an unpardonable accusation. Possibly she might have been graceful had she chosen to be; but what she was after principally was energy, and she got it, — whole car-loads of it. Her comic resource was inexhaustible, her animal spirits were irrepressible, and her audacity approached the sublime.

Yet, amid all her amazing unconventionality and her astonishing athletic feats, one found, if he met her on her own plane of impersonal jollity, neither vulgarity nor suggestiveness. Her mental attitude toward her audience was absolutely clean and straightforward. She was not a woman cutting up antics and indulging in unseemly pranks, but a royal good fellow with an infinite variety of jest.

With nothing especially tangible to offer as evidence, I have a suspicion that Marie Dressler, if she could escape from her reputation as a burlesquer, might act a "straight" part not at all badly. It is only a fine line between burlesque and legitimate acting, only a triflingly different mental attitude, which results in travesty instead of seriousness. Of course, the burlesque must be set forth with the proper amount of exaggeration to give point to the take-off, but that is only a matter of technique. Artificiality in actors and insincerity in dramatists very often result in unconscious burlesque. The melodramatic school is particularly prone to this most inartistic of blunders, and many a good laugh has followed lines that were supposed to be charged with the most highly colored sentiments and situations that were intended to be dramatically strong and impressive. One at all familiar with Miss Dressler's methods cannot have failed to notice her trick of beginning

a speech with profound and even convincing seriousness and ending it in ridiculous contrast with a sudden drop from the dramatic to the commonplace. In spite of the fact that one knows for a certainty that she is fooling him, she succeeds invariably in making the first part of her sentence seem honest and sincere.

Now, I do not believe that she could hit just the right key every time in these startling and laughter-provoking contrasts, if she did not have to an unusual extent the instinct for dramatic effect, which is so large a part of the equipment of the legitimate actor. However, I hope that she will never make the experiment. There are already enough serious actors of ordinary calibre, while the genuine burlesquer of Marie Dressler quality is rare indeed.

Miss Dressler's versatility as a single entertainer was splendidly illustrated in a curious variety act, which was called "Twenty

Minutes in Shirt Waists." It was devised for the sole purpose of showing off to the best advantage Miss Dressler's native talent for fun-making and travesty. It was mere hodge-podge, of course, with neither rhyme nor reason, but it did afford Miss Dressler every chance that she could desire to display her marvellous resource as a comic entertainer. The title of the sketch, "Twenty Minutes in Shirt Waists," suggested some sort of a disrobing act, but in that it was deceptive. Indeed, the title — and possibly it was all the better for that — had no connection at all with the act beyond the fact that Miss Dressler and her assistant, Adele Farrington, both wore shirt waists of spotless white. It was a very intimate and unstagy affair. The two entertainers called each other Marie and Adele, and they kept up the illusion of spontaneous comradeship by appearing, or seeming to appear, in the Eleanora Duse fashion, without facial make-up. The turn itself was a

continuous "jolly," and Miss Dressler introduced before it was over about everything funny that she ever did in the theatre, including the amusing revolving hat of "The Lady Slavey" fame.

Miss Dressler was born in Canada, and went on the stage when she was sixteen years old; and in spite of the fact that she was without experience, — in fact, before she had ever seen a comic opera, — she rather inverted the ordinary method of procedure, and started at once to play old women. Her first character was Katisha in "The Mikado" in a company managed by Jules Grau. The reason, so she claims, that she made a try at "old women" was because she was too big and healthy ever to meet with success as a soubrette. Her Katisha was sufficiently liked to convince her that light opera was just the place for her, and thus her theatrical career began.

"I might state," remarked Miss Dressler, naïvely, in speaking of her early experiences,

"that we members of the Grau Company were promised and were supposed to receive very good salaries. All we got, however, was the promises, and they came early and often. No, that is not altogether true: we got besides the promises twenty-five cents which was handed to each member of the company every night. It was supposed to be squandered in the purchase of beer. I forgot this little circumstance, for I did not drink beer, and consequently in my case the aforesaid quarter of a dollar was not forthcoming. This omission hurt me so much that I resigned from this enterprising organization, and wandered to Philadelphia. The exchequer was about as low as it well could be, and I was glad enough to take a place in the chorus of a summer company at eight dollars a week, — not a great deal, to be sure, but I got it, such as it was."

Miss Dressler's next engagement was with the Bennett and Moulton Opera Company,

from which Della Fox was also graduated. This organization played week stands in small cities and large towns, giving two performances a day and changing the bill every day. This may be said to have been Miss Dressler's school, for while under the Bennett and Moulton management she appeared in thirty-eight different operas and played every variety of part, from prima donna rôles to old women.

Following this arduous experience on the road came her first appearance in New York at the Fifth Avenue Theatre as Cunigonde in "The Robber of the Rhine," an opera of which Maurice Barrymore, who wrote the book, and Charles Puerner, who composed the music, never had reason to feel proud. Her first New York success of any consequence, therefore, was not made until she appeared with Camille D'Arville in "Madeleine, or the Magic Kiss." Her next venture was as the Queen in "1492," the

part which brought fame to that most accomplished woman impersonator, Richard Harlow. After the termination of this engagement she appeared for a time at the Garden Theatre, New York, under the management of A. M. Palmer, and then joined Lillian Russell in "Princess Nicotine." Her remarkable success in "The Lady Slavey" came next, and since then she has been seen in "Hotel Topsy Turvy," "The Man in the Moon," and vaudeville.

CHAPTER XVII

DELLA FOX

It was a dozen or fifteen years ago that the hard-working organization known as the Bennett and Moulton Opera Company was a frequent visitor to the small cities and large towns of New England. It played week stands with daily matinees, and it was, more than likely, the pioneer to flaunt in the theatrical field the conquering banner of "ten, twenty, thirty." I have every feeling of gratitude toward the Bennett and Moulton Opera Company, for it introduced me, at the modest rate of ten cents per introduction, which small sum purchased the right to sit aloft in the gallery, to all the famous old-time operettas, —"Olivette," "The Mascotte," "The Chimes of Normandy," and others.

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DELLA FOX.

As I recall the annual performances of this obscure troupe, they were surprisingly good. At least, so they seemed to me, and I can laugh even now at the excruciatingly funny fellow who sang the topical song, "Bob up Serenely" in "Olivette." There was also a curious dance, I remember, that went with the song, — a spreading out simultaneously of arms and legs in jumping-jack fashion, — and we boys thought it vastly amusing. We clapped and stamped and whistled, and kept the poor comedian at work as long as our breath held out and long after his had gone.

The last time that I saw the Bennett and Moulton Opera Company was in "Fra Diavolo," and the prima donna — the term seems ridiculous and absurd as I think of the person to whom it is applied — was a golden-haired little creature, wonderfully simple, tremendously in earnest, and strangely fascinating, a dainty slip of a girl, who seemed, in truth, only a child. I can see her now as she sat

on the edge of the bed in the chamber scene, unfastening her shoes, singing very sweetly and very expressively her good-night song, all unconscious of the bold brigands who were watching the proceedings from their places of concealment. She charmed me as no singer in light opera ever had before, and the impression that she made upon me has never been lost. The child was Della Fox, of whom at that time no one had ever heard — Della Fox in the humblest of surroundings, but to me more fascinating than in any of the brilliant settings that have since been hers.

I did not see Della Fox again until 1890, when she was playing Blanche in "Castles in the Air" with DeWolf Hopper. She had changed greatly in the few years, though far less than she has since the days of "Castles in the Air," "Wang," and "Panjandrum." Her appealing, unsophisticated girlishness had gone, and in its place was self-possession

and authority. She was charming in her daintiness, provoking in her coquetry, a tantalizing atom of femininity. Her archness was not bold nor unwomanly, and her vivacity was well within the bounds of refinement and good taste. Her singing voice, too, was musical, though not over strong.

Della Fox was born in St. Louis on October 13, 1872. Her father, A. J. Fox, was a photographer, who made something of a specialty of theatrical pictures; and thus Della's babyhood was passed, not exactly in the playhouse atmosphere, perhaps, but certainly in an atmosphere next door to that of the greasepaint and footlights. Her experience on the stage began when she was only seven years old as the midshipmate in a children's "Pinafore" company, which travelled in Missouri and Illinois for a season. She was an astonishingly precocious child, and many persons who watched her shook their heads and predicted that her talent had

ripened too early, and that, as is the case with many promising stage children, she would never amount to anything.

Apparently this midshipmate experience firmly established in Miss Della's childish mind the intention to become an actress. Her parents, however, succeeded in keeping her in school for a few years longer, though she appeared in several local performances where a child was needed. When she was nine years old, for instance, she acted for a week in St. Louis the child's part in the production of "A Celebrated Case" of which James O'Neill was the star, and she was also at one time with a "Muldoon's Picnic" company. Her first real professional experience, however, was obtained with an organization known as the Dickson Sketch Club.

This was gotten up by four St. Louis young men, W. F. Dickson and W. G. Smythe, both of whom became prominent theatrical managers, Augustus Thomas, the

playwright, and Edgar Smith, the author of several Casino pieces, and at present writer-in-ordinary to Weber and Fields. Mr. Thomas made a one-act play of Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett's story, "Editha's Burglar," and the company also appeared in a musical farce called "Combustion." Della Fox was the Editha in the play and the soubrette in the musical piece, while Mr. Thomas acted Bill Lewis, the burglar, and Mr. Smith was Paul Benton. Miss Fox's impersonation of Editha was, according to report, very good indeed. At any rate, the success of the play was sufficient to encourage the author to expand it to three-acts. The result was "The Burglar," one of the first plays in which Mr. E. H. Sothern appeared as a star. In the three-act version Sothern acted Bill Lewis, the burglar, and Elsie Leslie was Editha.

Mr. Dickson, who is now connected with the business staff of the Alhambra in Chi-

cago, referred not long ago to this early experience as a manager.

"Yes," he said, "that was 'Gus' Thomas's debut as a dramatic author. 'Gus' was in the box office with me at the Olympic in St. Louis, and he managed to find time during the leisure moments when he was not selling tickets to scribble ideas in dramatic form. He read me this little sketch, 'Editha's Burglar,' and asked me to give it a trial. Right across the street from the theatre lived Della Fox, daughter of a photographer, a precocious little miss, whose talents were always in requisition whenever there were any child's parts to be filled at the theatre. I used to send over for Della whenever there was a little part for her, and she was delighted to get away from school and skip and trip before the footlights. After 'Gus' had read the play to me, he suggested that Della should play little Editha, and as a result I was induced to put the piece on with the budding author in the prin-

cipal rôle. It had a certain sort of success, and we went on a tour, using 'The Burglar' as a curtain raiser to another play called 'Combustion,' also from 'Gus' Thomas's pen. Later 'The Burglar' was produced in New York as a curtain-raiser to William Gillette's comedy, 'The Great Pink Pearl.' Gillette himself played the burglar, and Mr. Thomas was encouraged to expand his sketch into a pretentious three-act play, and it went on the road, making money for the managers and familiarizing the public with Augustus Thomas's name."

Next came Miss Fox's connection with the Bennett and Moulton Company, with which she appeared in the leading soprano rôles of all the light operas, — "Fra Diavolo," "The Bohemian Girl," "The Pirates of Penzance," "Billie Taylor," "The Mikado," and "The Chimes of Normandy." Her success with this minor organization brought her to the notice of Heinrich Conried, who was getting to-

gether an opera company to appear in "The King's Fool." She was given the soubrette part, and created something of a stir wherever the opera was given by her singing of "Fair Columbia," one of the most popular songs of the piece. From Mr. Conried also she received about all the real instruction in dramatic art that she had ever had. When Davis and Locke, who had managed the Emma Juch Opera Company, decided to launch DeWolf Hopper as a star, they began to look about for a small-sized soubrette to act as a foil for Mr. Hopper's great height. George W. Lederer, of the New York Casino, suggested Della Fox, and accordingly she was engaged and opened with Hopper in "Castles in the Air" at the Broadway Theatre, New York, in May, 1890.

Her success in this larger field was remarkable, and before the summer was over she was sharing the honors with Hopper and was just as strong a popular favorite as he. Her

Blanche was a delightful creation throughout, but best remembered is the "athletic duet" in which she and Hopper gave amusing pantomimic representations of games of billiards, baseball, and other familiar sports. Her Mataya in "Wang," which was brought out in New York in the summer of 1891, was another triumph. This was, perhaps, the most artistic of all her rôles. She was cute, impish, and jaunty in turn as the Crown Prince, and, in addition, was a picture never to be forgotten in her perfect fitting white flannel suit, worn in the second act. It was in this act, too, that she sang the famous summer-night's song, which was whistled and hand-organed throughout the land.

Next Miss Fox created the principal soubrette rôle in Mr. Hopper's opera "Panjandrum," in which she continued to appear until she made her début as a star in August, 1894, at the Casino, New York, in Goodwin and Furst's opera, "The Little Trooper."

Her first season was extremely successful. The next year she was seen in "Fleur-de-lis," another Goodwin-Furst product. Writing of Miss Fox in this opera, Philip Hale said: —

"Disagreeable qualities in the customary performance of Miss Fox were not nearly so much in evidence as in some of her other characters. She was not so deliberately affected, she was not so brazen in her assurance. Even her vocal mannerisms were not so conspicuous. She almost played with discretion, and often she was delightful. Her self-introduction to her father was one long to be remembered. No wonder that the audience insisted on seeing it again and again. All in all, Miss Fox appeared greatly to her advantage."

His criticism of the opera is also interesting:

"It was March 31, 1885, that 'Pervenche,' an operetta, text by Duru and Chivot, music by Audran, was first produced at the Bouffes-

Parisiens. Mrs. Thuillier-Leloir was the Pervenche, Maugé the Count des Escarbilles, and Mesnacker the Marquis de Rosolio. The honors of the evening, however, were borne away by Mr. and Mrs. Piccaluga, who were respectively Frederick and Charlotte. The opera did not please, and it ran only twenty-nine nights. Nor has it been revived.

"In the time of Henry the Second, or Henry the Third, two nephews disputed the right to possess a castle in Touraine that had belonged to their late uncle, who died without will. Rosolio held the castle, and Escarbilles tried to dislodge him. By the will, found eventually, the castle belonged to Rosolio if Frederick, the son of Escarbilles, should marry Pervenche, the natural daughter of Rosolio.

"The performance was in the main poor, and the music of Audran was not distinguished, they say. A romance of Frederick, a pastorale Tyrolienne sung by Charlotte at

the end of the second act, and a duet of menders of faience in the third act, said to be the best of the three, alone seemed worthy of remark.

"So much for 'Pervenche,' the libretto of which furnished the foundation for Mr. Goodwin's story and songs. Just how far Mr. Goodwin departed from the situations furnished by Messrs. Durn and Chivot, I am unable to say, for I never saw 'Pervenche' nor its libretto. However much he may be indebted, this can be truly said: he has written an entertaining book; the plot is coherent, and the situations laughable. The second act is admirable throughout. The colossal effrontery of the starved Rosolio in the castle manned by women disguised as soldiers, the reconciliation of the nephews, the exchange of reminiscences of gay student days in Paris, the discovery of the imposition, and the renewed hostilities, — these are amusing and well connected. Furthermore,

the audience at the end of this act realizes at once the need of a third act, to clear up matters. Now this is rare in operetta of to-day. Even in the third act the interest never flags, although there was one dreadful moment, when it looked as though the old 'Mascotte' third-act business was to be introduced. Fortunately the suspicion was groundless, and the audience breathed freer and forgot its fears in the enjoyment of the delightful scenes between Des Escarbilles and the miller, and then the ghost.

"Not so much can be said in praise of the music. It is the same old thing that has served in many operettas. There is a jingle, there are the inevitable waltz tunes that always sound alike. But the music gives the comedians an excuse for singing and dancing. It thus serves its turn and is promptly forgotten until another operetta comes, and the hearer has a vague impression that he has heard the tunes before."

"The Wedding Day," with Della Fox, Lillian Russell, and Jefferson De Angelis in the cast, was brought out in the fall of 1897, and it revived to a degree old-time memories of players at the Casino. The opera itself proved to be of an order of merit recalling "Falka," "The Merry War," and "Nanon," the like of which had not appeared for many, many seasons. The music was ambitious without being dull, and some of the concerted numbers had genuine musicianly value. The story held its interest fairly well, though in spots it was too complicated, and at one point in the third act quite absurd. Still it was an excellent vehicle to display the talents of the so-called "triple alliance" of comic opera stars. Miss Fox, who had shown a decided tendency toward stoutness, had trained down to within hailing distance of her former slender lithesomeness, and she made a pretty and attractive bride.

The following season found Miss Fox again

an individual star, this time in "The Little Host." Her last appearances in opera were made in this piece, for after her season had begun in the fall of 1899, she was taken seriously ill, and for a long time her death was expected. She recovered partially, however, after months of illness, and in the spring of 1900 she appeared for a few months in vaudeville. Even this labor proved too much for her strength, and her friends were compelled to remove her to a place where she might have perfect rest.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAMILLE D'ARVILLE

CAMILLE D'ARVILLE, like Lillian Russell, Pauline Hall, and Jessie Bartlett Davis, is one of the old guard, in American light opera. She has not appeared in opera for some time, for during the season of 1899–1900 she followed the general inclination and went into vaudeville. From these appearances it was apparent that her voice was not what it had been once — and little wonder that it had failed, when one recalls how continuously that voice has been in use since the owner left her Dutch home, forswore her own name of Neeltye Dykstra, and first learned to talk a prettily accentuated English. She still had in full the power to win an audience instantly and completely. Nor had she lost to any

perceptible degree her rare good looks. A little fuller in the figure, perhaps, than she was five years ago, she carried herself with the same fine grace and perfect poise which were of themselves an art.

Camille D'Arville has temperament, and she has style. It is these two qualities particularly that have brought her success so often in dashing cavalier parts, parts which require that a woman shall act either a man or a woman masquerading as a man. The modern comic opera librettist often has but one main purpose in mind, that is, to get his prima donna in tights as soon after the show begins as possible and keep her in them as long as practical. Indeed, if one were looking for a practical way to distinguish modern comic opera from extravaganza, he might find it in this matter of tights. If the leading woman represent a woman disguised as a man, she is an operatic prima donna; if, on the contrary, she be represented as a man

from start to finish, she is merely principal "boy" in extravaganza.

I suppose this tendency toward tights, which is so common as to be almost a light-opera conventionality, is an outgrowth or heritage from the old-fashioned burlesque. In fact, the difference between the modern comic opera and the burlesque of thirty years ago is purely one of degree. The relation between the two is similar to that between the variety show of eight years ago and the so-called "fashionable vaudeville" of to-day. Variety has been put through what managers of the large circuits call a refining process. There is no denying that the old-style variety show in most of its components was crude, noisy, and vulgar, and that its surroundings were scarcely favorable to the development of high art. But one was always sure of finding vigor and life — plenty of both — in the old-time varieties, and there were oftentimes spontaneity and humor — rude and bucolic,

perhaps, but real, just the same — which one is not sure of meeting in the latter-day entertainments so carefully prepared for the mentally delicate and sensitive.

Modern comic opera has adopted in a modified and refined form the chief characteristics — one of them the woman in tights and another of them the clown with his perfunctory low comedy — of the old-fashioned burlesque. Of course, the opera makes more pretensions than did the burlesque, and musically it is superficially superior, not necessarily more tuneful but orchestrated with more scholarly skill. Stage pageantry today is also much further developed, and spectacular effects are far more elaborate. The costuming is richer and more tasteful, and the women on the stage — if not actually younger and prettier — are certainly daintier and more feminine. The girlishness and natural beauty of many modern light-opera choruses are simply amazing.

If we look beneath these externals, however, we find that the comic opera of to-day is hardly an advance over the burlesque of yesterday. There was good stuff in most of the old burlesques. They had original ideas, plenty of simple dramatic action, and some genuine comedy, but it is seldom that one finds any of these three essentials in the book of the modern comic opera. Not for ten years, I am tempted to declare, has there been written a light-opera libretto with sufficient intrinsic merit to attract the public attention without the assistance of the most magnetic personalities surrounded and set forth by the most gorgeous of stage accessories.

Camille D'Arville's cavaliers — and in recent years she has not played a part that did not require male attire — are a direct heritage from the burlesque stage. When Camille d'Arville becomes a man, she makes the change from petticoats without the slightest

show of self-consciousness. I heard her once termed the most modest woman in tights on the stage. That was simply an acknowledgment of her complete effacement of the personal equation. Yet her individuality was not at all diminished, her presence was inspiring, and her acting both vivacious and forceful.

Camille D'Arville was born in 1863 in the village of Oldmarck, Province of Overyseel, Holland, and came of a family that had never shown any theatrical or especial musical talent. When she was twelve years old, her voice gave promise of developing into something more than the ordinary, and she was sent to the Conservatory at Amsterdam for instruction. Here she made her first appearance in concert in 1877. Later she went to Vienna, where she received further instruction, and also made a successful appearance in a one-act operetta.

"I was a big girl fourteen or fifteen years

old before I saw other lands than my own Holland," remarked Miss D'Arville, "and after I left Amsterdam I was on the Continent and in England for a long time before I returned home. I still claim Holland as my birthright, however, and I do not want to be called anything but Dutch. If I have a trace of French accent in speaking English, as some claim, it is not my fault.

"But, do you know," she continued, "if it were purely a matter of inclination, I think I should much rather be an actress than to be a singer. Of course, I love music, but what can be more gratifying than to portray the heroines of Shakespeare and other great dramatists? But my natural endowment as a singer led me toward the operatic career. In opera I prefer a strong dramatic rôle, a part which has only one grand song if it afford plenty of opportunity for acting.

"When did I first sing in public? Oh, I can't remember that. I appeared in con-

certs in Amsterdam when I was a girl, and by the time I entered my teens I took part in operatic performances given by the Conservatory pupils. Do you mean when did I make my real début in opera? I suppose that might be said to have occurred in March, 1883, at the Strand Theatre, London, in an operetta entitled 'Cymbria, or the Magic Thimble.'"

Before this, however, Miss D'Arville had anything but a pleasant experience in London. She went there under the supposition that she had been engaged to sing in opera. The managerial promise she found to be worthless, and she had to be satisfied with a chance to earn a little money in a music hall. It was after several months of the most uncongenial toil that she finally gained recognition in "Cymbria."

"Harry Paulton was responsible for that appearance," continued Miss D'Arville. "He heard me sing, and under his tuition I learned the words of the opera and sung them before

I understood their meaning. It was not long, however, before I could speak English fairly well. The Dutch, you know, are famous linguists.

"In October of the same year I created the part of Gabrielle Chevrette in 'La Vie,' an adaptation by H. B. Farnie of Offenbach's 'La Vie Parisienne.' The critics spoke very kindly of me then, but were much more generous in their praises when during the following spring I appeared as Fredegonda in a revival of M. Hervé's 'Chilperic' given at the Empire Theatre. Perhaps chief among my early successes was in 'Rip Van Winkle.' I succeeded Miss Sadie Martinot in the leading soprano part, and sang it until the end of the opera's long run. Fred Leslie was the Rip Van Winkle, and very fine he was, too. It was a pity he afterward became so thoroughly identified with burlesque."

It was at the time of her first appearance in opera in England that the singer adopted the

name of Camille D'Arville. It was chosen for euphony only, and had no significance whatever.

After her success in "Rip Van Winkle" Miss D'Arville toured the English province with "Falka," and in 1887 returned to London to play in "Mynheer Jan." This was followed by an engagement at the Gaiety Theatre, and her position in London seemed established, when a quarrel with the management caused her to break her contract and she appeared at another theatre in the title rôle of "Babette."

Miss D'Arville first came to this country in the spring of 1888, being under engagement to J. C. Duff; and her first appearance here was made in New York in April in "The Queen's Mate" in the cast with Lillian Russell. In the fall Miss D'Arville returned to London, where she appeared in "Carina," in which piece her charming archness was a feature. The Carl Rosa Company then en-

gaged her to take the part of Yvonne in "Paul Jones," in which Agnes Huntington as the hero had taken the city by storm. With the same company she also created the title rôle in "Marjorie," which also enjoyed a long run. During the summer of 1889 Miss D'Arville became connected with the New York Casino, appearing in "La Fille de Madame Angot," "The Grand Duchess," and "Poor Jonathan." Back to London she hied herself once more, and for a time was heard at the Trocadero and Pavillon. Then she returned to the United States, and joined the Bostonians, with whom she sang Arline in "The Bohemian Girl," Maid Marion in "Robin Hood," and Katherine in a revival of "The Mascotte." She was probably the most satisfactory Maid Marion, all things considered, that ever sang the part. Certainly she was better as an actress than Marie Stone, who had previously taken the rôle, and she was physically better fitted to the character than

Alice Nielsen. Critics, who up to that time had not been entirely satisfied with Miss D'Arville, claiming that her vocal method was bad and her acting oftentimes crude and meaningless, found her work in "Robin Hood" very much to their taste.

"As a singer she has improved during the past year," said one. "Her tones are purer; she uses her voice with more discretion; and she has discovered that a scream is not synonymous with forte. She is vivacious; she lends a dramatic interest that has been sadly lacking in former performances of this company, when the members were too apt to mistake the audience for a congregation and the stage for a choir loft. She is fair to look upon, and yet she does not strive to monopolize attention."

After quitting the Bostonians Miss D'Arville starred in Edward E. Rice's spectacular production of the extravaganza "Venus," which was first acted in Boston in September, 1893.

Her dashing Prince Kam, that imaginary Thibetian potentate, who, finding no earthly beauty that satisfied his ideal, journeyed to Mars, where he succeeded in winning the love of Venus herself, was a thoroughly delightful characterization.

"A Daughter of the Revolution," with which Miss D'Arville was next identified, was made over by J. Cheever Goodwin and Ludwig Engländer from a comic opera called "1776," produced some ten years before by a German company playing at the Thalia Theatre in New York. It achieved but limited popularity at that time, but in its revised form it was an agreeable, if not exactly exciting, entertainment. It was not an ideal comic opera, by any means. Too much of the machinery of construction was left visible for that. There were two characters, the dealer in military supplies and the laundress, so obviously dragged in simply because the low-comedy man needed a foil and a

soubrette to play opposite to him, that one looked to see the marks of violence on their ears. But librettos are hard things to write — they must be or we should certainly find one now and then that is above reproach — so one would fain overlook jarring circumstances for the sake of the tuneful melodies of the score and the brisk action. Miss D'Arville sang well, and made an attractive picture in her series of becoming costumes.

A starring tour in "Madeleine; or the Magic Kiss," a comic opera of considerable merit although it never won more than a fair degree of popularity, was her next venture, and then she was engaged to create the prima donna rôle of Lady Constance in "The Highwayman," a Reginald DeKoven and Harry B. Smith composition. A quarrel with the management while rehearsals were in progress caused her to retire from the company, however, and her place was taken by Hilda Clark.

CHAPTER XIX

MARIE TEMPEST

No better characterization of Marie Tempest, that wonderfully fascinating personality which last appeared in this country during the season of 1893–94 in "The Algerian," have I ever seen than that written by Charles Frederick Nirdlinger and published several years ago in the "Illustrated American."

"Nell Gwynne lives again in the person of Marie Tempest," declared Mr. Nirdlinger. "From out of a past tinkling with tuneful poesy, sparkling with the glory of palettes that limned only beauty and grace, bubbling with the merriment and gallantry of gay King Charlie's court, there trips down to moderns a most convincing counterfeit of that piquant creature. If one may trust imagination's ear, little Tempest sings as

MARIE TEMPEST.

pretty Nell did: in the same tenuous, uncertain voice, with the same captivating tricks of tone, the same significant nuances, and the same amorous timbre. Tempest talks just as Nell did, and walks with the same sturdy stride, — there was nothing mincing about Nell, — and, if one may trust to fancy's eye, she looks just as Nell looked. I have seen Nell a hundred times, and so have you, dear reader. The mere sight of that curt, pert, and jadish name — Nell Gwynne — calls up that strangely alluring combination of features: the tip-tilted nose, the pouting lips, the eyes of a drowsy Cupid, the confident, impudent poise of the head. None of them fashioned to the taste of the painter or sculptor, but forming in their unity a face of pleasing witchery.

"There is no record of Nell's artistic methods, of the school of her mimetic performance, or the style of her singing. All we know of that sort of thing we must gather

from the rhymes and rhapsodies of the poets. Some of them wrote in prose, to be sure; but they were poets for all that, and poets are such an unreliable lot when it comes to judging such a girl as Nell. If she had any art, though, I 'll be bound it was like Tempest's. There is but one way to be infinitely charming in the craft of the theatre, — the eternal verities of art prevent that it should be otherwise, — and whatever devices of mimic mechanism Nell employed must have been those of her modern congener. But she never studied in Paris, some sceptic will say, and Tempest did: how could Nell Gwynne have mastered the lightness of touch, the exquisite refinement of gesture, the infinity of significant byplay that constitute the distinctly Parisian method of Tempest? To that I would answer that Tempest's method is not distinctly Parisian, that it is not at all Parisian. She is a delightful artist, not because of her brief period of Gallic training, but in spite of it.

"Elsewhere I have ventured an opinion on the subject of what we have been taught to regard as the French school of comic opera. That school, if we may judge of its academic principles and practices by the performances of some of its most proficient graduates, has nothing in common with the methods of Tempest. Wanton wiles and indecent suggestion, — these are the essential features of that ridiculously lauded French school; kicks and winks and ogling glances, postures of affected languor, and convincing feats of vicious sophistication. Where, in all that, is to be found the simple graciousness, the dainty, delicate, unobtrusive art of Marie Tempest? To liken her to the garish product of that French school — as well liken Carot's sensuous nymph of the wood to Bougereau's sensual nymph of the bath! For my own part, I don't believe Tempest belongs to any school, or if she does, it is a school of which she is at once mistress and sole pupil. Indeed, it may be

doubted whether instruction and training have any considerable part in the charm of such a player. There are women of infinitely better method — not manner — of singing and acting; women with whom nature has dealt far more carefully and generously in beauty of face and figure; women even in no degree inferior to Tempest in innate allurement. But this little Englishwoman, with her svelte form and her bewitching face of ugly features, her tricky voice that makes one think of a thrush that has caught a cold, her impertinences and patronizing ways with her audience, has about her a vague, illusive something that makes of her the most fetching personality of the comic-opera stage."

Marie Tempest, whose real name is Marie Etherington, was born in London in 1867. Her father died while she was a child, and she was educated abroad by her mother. Five or six years of her life were spent in a convent near Brussels. From there she was sent to

Paris to finish her education, afterward going to London, where she became a student at the Royal Academy of Music.

At that time she had no idea of going upon the stage. Her exceptional musical talent at once became apparent to the professors at the academy, notably Emanuel Garcia, who, although then upward of eighty years of age, took the liveliest interest in his young pupil. Miss Tempest worked so successfully with Garcia that within eighteen months of her entrance at the academy she had carried off from all other competitors the bronze, silver, and gold medals representing the highest rewards the academy could offer. She also studied for a time with Signor Randeggor, in London, and in 1886 made her first appearance on any stage at the London Comedy in "Boccaccio." It was a small part that she played in the London company managed by Arthur Henderson, and the salary which she received was four pounds a week.

After that she created the soprano part in an opera called "The Fay o' Fire" at the Opera Comique, from thence returning for a few months to the Comedy Theatre to take Florence St. John's place in "Erminie." Miss Tempest then took an engagement with Augustus Harris at the Drury Lane in Hervise's comic opera, "Frivoli." In 1887 she joined Henry J. Leslie's company, then playing at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, London, in Alfred Cellier's opera, "Dorothy," in which she assumed the title rôle. In this part Miss Tempest made a very great success. She played in "Dorothy" for nearly nine hundred performances at the Prince of Wales and Lyric theatres. Subsequently she appeared at the Lyric in Cellier's opera of "Doris" and after that in "The Red Hussar." Although Miss Tempest was engaged chiefly in light opera, during these years she at various times undertook more serious work, frequently singing in oratorio and in the high-class London concerts.

She came to this country for the first time in the spring of 1890, appearing in New York and after on tour as Kitty Carroll in "The Red Hussar." Her success was remarkable, and she at once became an established favorite. Although the prima donna of to-day might consider Kitty Carroll, with only its three changes of costume, from soldier to beggar girl and then to heiress, a veritable sinecure, Marie Tempest's skill in passing quickly from one character to another was ten years ago quite as much commented on as was her unquestionably artistic presentation of the triple rôles. She also repeated in this country her London success in "Dorothy," and sang in "Carmen" as well.

Miss Tempest was next seen at the New York Casino as the successor to Lillian Russell and Pauline Hall. In the operetta, "The Tyrolean," she had a part scarcely equal to her abilities, although the nightingale song, which came in the last act, was a charming melody

and was so delightfully sung by Miss Tempest as really to be the feature of the performance. In her peasant's dress Miss Tempest was the choicest of dainty morsels, a dream of fairylike loveliness.

Her greatest success in this country, however, was "The Fencing Master" in which the prima donna rôle was peculiarly suited to her personality. This opera was built around the conceit of a master of fencing, who, not being blessed with a son to succeed him in his profession, brought up his daughter as a boy, and by severe training made her a most expert user of foil and sword. In this character Miss Tempest united remarkably well boyish freedom and masculine swagger with feminine charm and ingenuousness, and the picture that she made was one never to be forgotten. It was true, however, in spite of her great attractiveness in the part, that tights and tunic did take away a little of that subtle bewitchery, which was the root of her wonder-

ful winsomeness in "Dorothy." It was a Boston critic, I believe, who said of her in this opera, that she suggested a Dresden china image that had hopped down from the mantel and committed an indiscretion. Still another, evidently a bit of a china connoisseur himself, applied the fancy porcelain simile with far more searching analysis. "She reminds one of a bit of Sèvres china," he declared, "although a pretty piece of Dresden would not be an inappropriate simile, especially when she is dressed in that picturesquely ragged costume in the first act. Sèvres china, however, is to an art connoisseur what truffles and pâte-de-foie gras are to an accomplished epicure." Whether she were Dresden china or Sèvres china, it mattered not; the main fact remained that a thoroughly feminine woman like Miss Tempest needed the fuss and feathers of feminine attire to bring out her attractions in the most effective way. That the public unconsciously felt this was proven even in

"The Fencing Master," where her appearance in the last act in all the glory of court gown and flashing jewels was always the signal for the heartiest applause.

In "The Algerian," by Reginald DeKoven and Glen MacDonough, which followed "The Fencing Master," being brought out in Philadelphia in September, 1893, Miss Tempest not only returned to the garb of her own sex, but appeared as well in her own auburn hair with that tiny irresistible curl hanging down the middle of her forehead, just like that of the little girl in the old ballad.

At the close of the run of this opera in 1894, Miss Tempest returned to London. Her greatest hits of recent years in that city have been made as the heroine in "The Artist's Model" and as O Mimosa San in George Edwardes's original production of "The Geisha" at Daly's Theatre in London.

CHAPTER XX

MAUD RAYMOND

HIGH in the ranks of women low comedians who have been graduated from the variety theatre into musical comedy and extravaganza, is Maud Raymond, who fairly shares the honors with the Rogers Brothers in their popular vaudevilles. It would be unfair to call Miss Raymond an actress, for she does not aspire to be anything more than a delightful entertainer, whose unusual mimetic gifts and whose real or assumed sense of humor led her to adopt as the most natural thing imaginable the serious calling of making the world laugh.

With her marked individuality, Miss Raymond drifted as a matter of course into character impersonation. In the days when she

entered the varieties three distinct types of low-comedy characterizations were recognized — the Irish, the Dutch, and the negro. The first two were genuine burlesques, while the last named was the familiar minstrel type, — a great deal of burnt cork and an insignificant amount of genuine negro. Miss Raymond selected the Dutch type. Whether she was the first woman to attempt a Dutch character sketch, I do not know, but I am willing to risk the statement that she was the best one.

An amazingly grotesque figure she presented, with her figure built on the lines of a meal sack with a string tied around the middle, and her huge sabots that clattered noisily every step she took. Her face was a study in ponderous stupidity, and her movements were slow and unwieldy. Yet, with all its grotesqueness, its mammoth exaggerations, there was human nature in the sketch and rich, full-blooded humor, the brutal, coarse humor of the soil, humor that had not been

refined into flavorless delicacy nor polished into insipidness for the moral salvation of too easily shocked tenderlings.

When the "coon" craze struck the stage, Miss Raymond was among the first to take that up, and she has clung faithfully to it ever since. Like all her work, her interpretation of the modern "coon" song is all her own. She does not reproduce so fantastically as some others the antics of the swell cake-walker, but she infuses into her work a rich humor that is infectious. In this one particular she resembles closely Miss May Irwin. May Irwin's "coon," however, is the Southern "mammy" type, while Maud Raymond's is of Northern city birth and training. In this aspect of her "coon" art, Miss Raymond seems nearer the progenitor of the up-to-date stage negro, who was, of course, the "nigger" minstrel of a number of decades ago.

Miss Raymond's method was capitally illustrated in the song "I thought that he had

Money in the Bank," which was introduced in "The Rogers Brothers in Wall Street" during the season of 1899–1900. Her dialect was by no means extraordinary. It had not the darky softness and twang, which one finds for instance so faithfully reproduced by Artie Hall. Miss Raymond, however, got a curious comic effect by twisting her words out of the corner of her mouth in a manner indescribable, by hunching up her shoulders, one a little higher than the other, thrusting her head forward, crooking her elbows, and letting her hands hang loose and lifeless as if they had been broken at the wrists.

After seeing Miss Raymond's inimitable Dutch woman, I carried away the impression that she herself inclined toward embonpoint, — that she was grossly notoriously fat, in fact. Later observations, however, have caused me to revise that impression. Miss Raymond is not fat, merely comfortably plump. She is a decided brunette with rather irregular feat-

ures, but features none the less attractive for that, snapping black eyes that seem always to sparkle with irrepressible merriment, and an inexhaustible amount of vivacity. Vivacity may, indeed, be said to be her specialty. It is always in evidence, and yet it never runs riot and it never becomes wearisome.

Miss Raymond has been a vaudeville feature for the past twelve years. She made her first appearance with Rice and Barton's company, and afterward played two years with Harry Williams's Own Company. Her next appearance was in the soubrette part in "Bill's Boot," in which Joe J. Sullivan starred. She then joined Irwin Brothers' Company, in which she sang with great success. She spent several weeks in the Howard Athenæum Company when it was under James J. Armstrong's management, and finished the season with Fields and Hanson.

Miss Raymond was specially engaged to play the soubrette rôle in Bolivar in Donnelly

and Girard's "The Rainmakers." Those popular stars declared that the part had never been so well done as it was by Miss Raymond, but she was obliged to retire at the end of the season on account of illness. During the summer she appeared on the roof gardens and in the continuous houses. She joined Tony Pastor's company in the early fall, and played a season of fifteen weeks with that organization, meeting with great success.

When the Rogers Brothers began starring with "The Reign of Error" in the fall of 1898, she was made a prominent feature of their company, and she continued with them as their leading support the following season in "The Rogers Brothers in Wall Street."

She is also the wife of one of the brothers, though whether of Max or Gus I never can remember.

CHAPTER XXI

PAULINE HALL

A VERY remarkable woman is Pauline Hall, whose stage career of twenty-five years encompasses every experience possible in light opera in this country. Miss Hall began as a dancer. She spent her apprenticeship in the chorus. She sang inconsequential rôles in opera, and she acted small parts in drama. She had her season in burlesque. She was for years the foremost figure in the best light-opera organization this country has ever known. She has starred, and she is to-day a better singer than the majority of her youthful contemporaries, a better actress than all except a very few of them, and a more satisfactory all-around artist — if the expression be permissible — than any of them.

When I heard her sing with Francis Wilson in "Cyrano de Bergerac" — about the stupidest opera, by the way, ever produced — and in "Erminie" in the spring of 1900, I was amazed; her voice was in splendid condition, certainly better than it had been five years before, true in tone, clear, and without huskiness. It showed its wear only in the loss of the richness and sweetness — the music, one might say — of the old Casino days. In figure Miss Hall was trim and youthful. Her face was plump and rounded like a girl's. Her hair, cut short for boys' parts and coquettishly curled, retained its dark, almost black, hue, while her eyes — wonderfully handsome they always were — snapped and sparkled like a débutante's.

Pauline Hall's fame reached its height during the long run of "Erminie" at the New York Casino. She was the originator of the rôle of the Erminie, and she sang in the opera in all the principal cities of the country.

She was — and is still, for that matter — one of the finest formed women on the American stage, and her stately manner and graceful demeanor gained for her the sobriquet so commonly associated with her name — statuesque. During her subsequent starring career Miss Hall continued a popular favorite, although she was not consistently successful in obtaining operas of notable merit. "Puritania" met with excellent success, but "The Honeymooners" and "Dorcas" were neither of them strong enough to make any lasting impression. They were both of the familiar "prima donna in tights" type, and their librettos were without striking originality, and their scores showed only commonplace tunefulness.

In spite of this handicap Miss Hall succeeded in maintaining — largely through the force of her personality and art — her place among the foremost in light opera in this country. During the season of 1899–1900

she most happily again became associated with Francis Wilson, who is also an "Erminie" product. Miss Hall, with her renewed youth and her years of experience, at once took a position in Wilson's company, second only to the star. In "Cyrano" she made Christian — a barren and sterile character — vigorous, picturesque, and attractive, while her Princess in "Erminie," barring the loss of vocal mellowness already referred to, was stronger than it was a dozen years ago.

Pauline Hall's active life on the stage began when she was about fifteen years old. She was born in Cincinnati about 1860 in rather humble quarters in the rear of her father's apothecary shop on Seventh Street. She bore the somewhat formidable and decidedly German name of Pauline Fredericka Schmidgall, until she adopted the simple and harmonious stage name of Pauline Hall.

It was in 1875, at Robinson's Opera House in Cincinnati, under the management of

Colonel R. E. J. Miles, that Miss Hall made her first appearance on the stage. She began at the very bottom of the ladder, an "extra girl" in the chorus and a dancer in the ballet. Next she journeyed to the Grand Opera House in the same city, a theatre which was also under Colonel Miles's management, where she remained until the versatile Mr. Miles organized and put on the road his "America's Racing Association and Hippodrome," a circus-like enterprise. She was made a feature in the street parade tableaux of Mazeppa used to advertise the attraction, and a very effective figure she must have been, too, for she was a handsome girl and a picture of physical perfection. Besides luring the public to the show, Miss Hall entertained it after it got there by driving a Roman chariot in the races.

After a summer of this exciting work Miss Hall returned to the theatre as a member of the chorus of the Alice Oates Opera Com-

pany, which was at that time making a Western tour under the management of the same Colonel Miles. Alice Oates was then in her prime, and the most popular operatic star in the country. She was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and educated in Louisville. When she was nineteen years old she made her début in Chicago in the Darnley burlesque, "The Field of the Cloth of Gold." She sang in "The Little Duke," "The Mascotte," "The Pretty Perfumer," "The Princess of Trebizonde," "The Grand Duchess," and "Olivette," and was one of the first of the many Ralph Rackstraws in "Pinafore" in this country. She died in Philadelphia on January 11, 1887, at the early age of thirty-seven years. She was small of figure and pretty of face, unusually so off the stage and dazzlingly so on the stage. Her voice was of rare compass and sympathetic in tone, and her acting was vivacious, dashing, and hearty.

After leaving the Alice Oates Company, small parts in Samuel Colville Folly company gave Miss Hall a slight advance in the theatrical world, and then she made her first and only appearance in the "legitimate." She joined Mary Anderson's company, and for three or four months acted minor characters in the plays of Miss Anderson's repertory, which at that time was somewhat limited. Among Miss Hall's parts were Lady Capulet in "Romeo and Juliet" and the Widow Melnotte in Lord Bulwer Lytton's stilted melodrama, "The Lady of Lyons."

In 1880, Miss Hall first began to be noticed by professional discoverers of stage talent. She was then a member of Edward E. Rice's "Surprise Party," with which she appeared in "Horrors" and "Revels." Next, in Rice's greatest success, "Evangeline," Miss Hall played Gabrielle and even Hans Wagner, being the first woman to try the droll character. In the fall of 1882 she went on a

tour with J. H. Haverly's "Merry War" company, and sang the part of Elsa. With Haverly she also appeared in "Patience." Following this engagement she rejoined Mr. Rice's forces, and on December 1, 1883, opened with his company at the Bijou Opera House, New York, where she created the part of Venus in "Orpheus and Eurydice." She was a success from the start, and continued with Mr. Rice until the close of the run of the burlesque on March 15 of the following year, when she went with the company, under the management of Miles and Barton, on the road.

On her return to New York, Miss Hall again appeared at the Bijou, on May 6, 1884, as Hasson in a revival of "Blue Beard," following this with another road experience that lasted until July. In August she began an engagement at Niblo's Garden, New York, as Loresoul in Poole and Gilmour's spectacular production of "The Seven Ravens." The

part was a singing one, and Miss Hall added considerably to her popularity among the frequenters of the burlesque shows that were so largely patronized in those days. In February, 1885, Miss Hall was in the title rôle of "Ixion" at the Comedy Theatre, New York, though only for a short time, and on April 4 she made her first appearance in a German speaking part, singing Prince Orloffsky in "Die Fiedermaus" at the Thalia Theatre.

On May 25 Miss Hall opened with Nat C. Goodwin at the Park Theatre, Boston, and created the character of Oberon in the travesty "Bottom's Dream." This was a failure, and in a few weeks Miss Hall returned to New York, where she signed with Rudolph Aronson of the Casino, making her first appearance, as Ninon de l'Enclos in the English presentation of "Nanon." She did well with the part, and further increased the favorable impression that she had made by her Angelo in "Amorita" and her Saffi in

"The Gipsy Baron." Next came "Erminie," which achieved a success as yet unequalled by any light opera in this country unless it be "Robin Hood." The successor to "Erminie" was "Nadjy," also a famous hit, in which, however, Miss Hall's part of the Princess Etelka was overshadowed by the character of Nadjy, the dancer, so captivatingly played by Marie Jansen in the original production. After "Nadjy" came "The Drum Major," which failed, however, to make any lasting impression.

After leaving the Casino Miss Hall began her career as a star, appearing in "Puritania." This was followed the next year by "Amorita" and "Madame Favart," while "Puritania" was retained in her repertory. The season succeeding she brought out "The Honeymooners." During 1894–95 her operas were "La Belle Hélène," a revival of "The Chimes of Normandy," and "Dorcas." She then retired from the stage for a while, and after-

ward appeared in vaudeville until she joined Francis Wilson.

"Puritania, or the Earl and the Maid of Salem," the best known and most successful of all her operas, was produced in Boston in the summer of 1892. The opera was written by C. M. S. McLellan, and Edgar Stillman Kelley was responsible for the music. The story of the opera was decidedly attractive. The action began in Salem. Elizabeth, a fair young miss of the town, had been accused of being a witch by Abigail, a confirmed woman-hater. Elizabeth was tried by the local tribunal and was condemned, chiefly because she had refused to wed Jonathan Blaze, the chief justice of the court. Just as the sentence was pronounced an English ship arrived in the harbor, and Vivian, Earl of Barrenlands, came ashore. He rescued Elizabeth from the mob, and captivated by her beauty proceeded to make love to her. Nothing would do but he must take her back to England

with him. Smith, the Witch-finder-general to his Majesty Charles II., was indignant because Vivian had won the girl, and threatened to expose her as a witch to the king.

The second act took place in a subterranean chamber under the king's palace, where Killsin Burgess, a conspirator, was plotting after the Guy Fawkes fashion to blow up everything. So deeply did he meditate on divers plots and treasons, that he fell asleep, lighted pipe in mouth and seated on a keg of gunpowder. The next scene showed the palace where King Charles had just bestowed his favor on Vivian and the future Countess of Barrenlands. Smith entered with Blaze and Abigail, and the trio denounced Elizabeth as a witch. Elizabeth, driven half mad by their false accusations, mockingly declared that she was a witch, and proceeded to "weave a spell." She summoned Asmodeus, the Prince of Eternal Darkness, to appear. A loud report was heard, and the

form of Burgess was hurled through the air. The sparks from his pipe had ignited the keg of powder which exploded just as Elizabeth was pretending to display her powers. Of course, Elizabeth was condemned by the king on this *prima facie* evidence; but Burgess, recognizing her as his daughter, confessed his conspiracy against the king, and all ended happily.

Miss Hall gave the opera a first-class production, a fine cast, and handsome scenery. Louise Beaudet acted Elizabeth, and graceful and charming she was, too. Miss Hall herself played Vivian. Frederic Solomon was the original Witch-finder-general, and his conception of the character was thoroughly original. Jacques Kruger as the Judge, Eva Davenport as Abigail, John Brand as the King, and Alf. Wheelan as the Conspirator were all happily chosen. The opera ran in Boston from June until September. Then Miss Hall took the opera on the road for a

season. "Puritania" was tuneful and bright in action. The dialogue was often sparkling, the fun was spontaneous, and the three comedians had parts which had the added value of being characters. Vivian was admirably suited to Miss Hall's talents. Her songs were given with spirit, her acting had that freedom so characteristic of her "boys," while her costumes were pictorially gorgeous.

Miss Hall's first husband was Edward White, whom she met in San Francisco in 1878, where he was engaged in mining enterprises. They were married in St. Louis in February, 1881. Eight years later Miss Hall secured a divorce from Mr. White, and in 1891 she was married to George B. McLellan, the manager of her company.

CHAPTER XXII

HILDA CLARK

THE divine gift of song has placed Hilda Clark, whose ability as an actress is by no means great, in a position of prominence in the theatrical world. She went on the stage because she could sing, and did not learn to sing because she was on the stage; and, owing to the fact that there is, always has been, and always will be a demand for attractive young women with pleasing singing voices, she has had her fair measure of success. Miss Clark has also the added charm of more than ordinary physical attractiveness. She is a blonde of prettily irregular features. Her personality is winning rather than compelling, and her stage presence is good, though there are times when this would have

been improved by more bodily grace and freedom. Byron, who hated a "dumpy woman," would have found Miss Clark "divinely tall and most divinely fair," but very likely he would have advised her to take a mild course in calisthenics in order to acquire conscious control of a somewhat unruly physique.

Hilda Clark comes of an old Southern family, several of whose members won military distinction. An ancestor of hers, Colonel Winston, was awarded a sword by Congress for his services in the Revolutionary War. Her great-grandfather, General Winston, was distinguished in the war of 1812, while several of her relatives were noted for gallantry during the Civil War. Miss Clark was born in Leavenworth, Kansas, in the early seventies. When her father, who was a banker, died, the family removed to Boston, where Miss Clark was educated. As she grew into womanhood,

her voice attracted the attention of her friends, and by their advice she went to Europe, where she studied music for two years. On her return to this country she became the soprano of St. Mark's Church in New York City, and it was there that Willard Spenser, the composer of "The Princess Bonnie," first heard her sing.

Miss Clark's voice is what is technically known as a soprano legere, and while she excels in floria music, her voice has considerable of that rare sympathetic quality possessed by coloratura singers. Her work in the theatre may be summed up in a few words. She made her début in the title rôle of "The Princess Bonnie" in September, 1895. After that she accepted the offer of The Bostonians, with whom she appeared for a season. In "The Serenade" she alternated in the rôle of Yvonne, the ballet dancer, with Alice Nielsen, and she also sung Maid Marian in "Robin Hood" and

Arline in "The Bohemian Girl." Next she was engaged by Klaw and Erlanger. She created the part of Lady Constance in "The Highwayman" after Camille D'Arville, who was expected to take the character, had quarrelled with the stage manager over some detail in the action, and refused to have anything more to do with the opera. Miss Clark was quite successful in this character, and it may be said to have established her firmly in the ranks of the light opera prima donnas. Next came her appearance in the prima donna rôle of John Philip Sousa's opera "The Bride Elect," in which she is best known by the general public.

Sousa is the most eminent composer for the bass drum and the cymbals that we have, and he can make music with more accents than any other man in the business. His powerful first and third beats set the feet to tapping and the head to

nodding, and the American public thinks that it is great stuff. So it is, the finest music for a military parade that ever came out of a brass band. Sousa writes his music with a metronome at his elbow clacking out the marching cadence of 120 to the minute. Every time the machine clacks he puts in a bang on the big drum and a clash with the cymbals. Then he weaves a stately moving melody around the bangs and the clashes, marks the whole business "fortissimo," and lets it go. He does not bother much about originality. His strong point is marches, and he knows it. In "The Bride Elect," he gave us marches — shall we say "galore"? The score was undoubtedly catchy, and the tunes pleased for the moment. As for the book, which was also by Sousa, it was nothing to boast of. It served admirably as a ringer-in for the marches.

Miss Clark's work in "The Bride Elect" was thoroughly satisfactory. She sang the music with splendid effect and with much brilliancy. Her acting, to be sure, was hardly all that could be desired, but, fortunately for her success, the book did not call for any great dramatic force. Miss Clark's career has been somewhat unusual in that she took at once a position of importance on the stage and has continued in positions of importance ever since. All this has happened because she could sing; and so busy has she been with her singing that she really has had no time to learn to act. In other words, in spite of her five years behind the footlights, she still lacks experience. The woman who starts in a humble capacity in the chorus and who climbs slowly to the heights of calciumdom may have at first very crude notions regarding action, but she learns as time goes on to be

non-committal in gesture at least. She may not develop into a histrionic genius, but she does acquire facility in the conventions of light opera that so often stand for acting. It is of just this facility that Hilda Clark is most in need.

Index

"Algerian,"
Tempest, Marie, 222, 232.
"All the Comforts of Home,"
Hall, Josephine, 47.
"American Beauty,"
May, Edna, 152.
Russell, Lillian, 32.
American Opera Company, 98.
"Amorita,"
Hall, Pauline, 247, 248.
Anderson, Mary, 245.
"Apollo,"
Russell, Lillian, 32.
"Aristocracy,"
Hall, Josephine, 47.
Aronson, Rudolph, 247.
"Artist's Model,"
Tempest, Marie, 232.
Ashley, Minnie, 134.
Atherton, Alice, 40.

"Babette,"
D'Arville, Camille, 217.
Barnabee, H. C., 19.
Barnet, R. A., 82, 83, 140, 141.
Barrymore, Maurice, 190.
Beaudet, Louise, 251.
"Belle Hélène,"
Hall, Pauline, 248.
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 112.
Lessing, Madge, 82.
Russell, Lillian, 42.
"Belle of New York,"
Edwardes, Paula, 113, 118.
May, Edna, 148, 149, 150, 151, 153.
Bennett & Moulton Opera Company, 189, 190, 192, 193, 194, 199.
Bernard, Caroline Richings, 94.
Bernhardt, Sarah, 28.
"Billie Taylor,"
Fox, Della, 199.
"Bill's Boot,"
Raymond, Maud, 137.
"Black Sheep,"
Edwardes, Paula, 117.
"Blue Beard,"
Hall, Pauline, 246.
"Boccaccio,"
Tempest, Marie, 227.
"Bohemian Girl,"
Clark, Hilda, 256.
D'Arville, Camille, 218.
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 99.
Fox, Della, 199.
Nielsen, Alice, 20.
Bostonians,
Clark, Hilda, 255, 256.
D'Arville, Camille, 218, 219.
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 88, 98, 99.
Nielsen, Alice, 19, 20.
"Bottom's Dream,"
Hall, Pauline, 247.

Braham, Harry, 38.
Brand, John, 251.
"Bride Elect,"
Celeste, Marie, 169.
Clark, Hilda, 256, 257, 258.
MacDonald, Christie, 180.
"Brigands,"
Russell, Lillian, 31, 32, 42.
"Broadway to Tokio,"
Templeton, Fay, 76, 78.
"Brownies,"
Celeste, Marie, 169.
Burnett, Mrs. Frances Hodgson, 197.
Burt, Laura, 118.

"Carina,"
D'Arville, Camille, 217.
Carl Rosa Opera Company, 217, 218.
Carleton Opera Company, 98.
"Carmen,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 99.
Tempest, Marie, 229.
Casino, New York, 25, 27, 29, 40, 65, 66, 200, 201, 206, 218, 229, 240, 247, 248.
"Casino Girl,"
Earle, Virginia, 29.
Gilman, Mabelle, 65.
Castle Square Opera Company, 19, 169.
"Castles in the Air,"
Fox, Della, 194, 195, 200, 201.
"Cavalleria Rusticana,"
Celeste, Marie, 169, 170.
"Celebrated Case,"
Fox, Della, 196.
Celeste, Marie, 156.
Cellier, Alfred, 228.
"Chantaclara,"
Nielsen, Alice, 14.
"Chieftain,"
Glaser, Lulu, 128, 129, 130, 131.
MacDonald, Christie, 180.
"Chilperic,"
D'Arville, Camille, 216.
"Chimes of Normandy,"
Fox, Della, 199.
Hall, Pauline, 248.
"Chorus Girl,"
Ashley, Minnie, 141.
"Chris and the Wonderful Lamp,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 112.
"Chums,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 110.
"Cigale,"
Russell, Lillian, 32.
"Cinderella,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
"Circus Girl,"
Ashley, Minnie, 135, 141.
Earle, Virginia, 28.
Gilman, Mabelle, 65.
Clark, Hilda, 221, 253.
"Club Friend,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 109.
Collier, Willie, 164.
"Combustion,"
Fox, Della, 197, 198, 199.
Conried, Heinrich, 199, 200.

"Contented Woman,"
May, Edna, 148.
"Corsair,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
Templeton, Fay, 74.
"County Fair,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
Crox, Elvia, 117.
"Cymbria, or the Magic Thimble,"
D'Arville, Camille, 215, 216.
"Cyrano de Bergerac,"
Glaser, Lulu, 124, 133.
Hall, Pauline, 240, 242.

Dale, Alan, 7, 8.
Daly, Augustin, 27, 29, 64, 71, 118.
"Dangerous Maid,"
Edwardes, Paula, 118.
Lessing, Madge, 86.
D'Arville, Camille, 190, 208, 256.
"Daughter of the Revolution,"
D'Arville, Camille, 220, 221.
Davenport, Eva, 251.
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 88, 208.
Davis, William J., 95.
Dazey, C. T., 103.
DeAngelis, Jefferson, 42, 206.
DeKoven, Reginald, 221, 232.
Desci, Max, 9.
"Devil's Deputy,"
Glaser, Lulu, 128.
MacDonald, Christie, 179, 180.
Dickson Sketch Club, 196, 197, 198, 199.
Dickson, W. F., 196, 197, 198, 199.
"Dinorah,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 97.
"Don Quixote,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 99.
"Dorcas,"
Hall, Pauline, 241, 248.
"Doris,"
Tempest, Marie, 228.
"Dorothy,"
Tempest, Marie, 228, 229, 232.
Dressler, Marie, 181.
"Dr. Syntax,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 111.
"Drum Major,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 98.
Hall, Pauline, 248.
Duff, J. C., 141, 217.
Duff Opera Company, 41.
Duse, Eleanora, 187.

Earle, Virginia, 21.
"Editha's Burglar,"
Fox, Della, 197, 198, 199.
Edouin, Willie, 40.
Edwardes, George, 232.
Edwardes, Paula, 47, 113.
Edwards, Julian, 172, 178.
"El Capitan,"
Ashley, Minnie, 140.
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 107, 111.
Engländer, Ludwig, 220.
"Erminie,"
Glaser, Lulu, 128, 133.
Hall, Pauline, 240, 242, 248.

MacDonald, Christie, 179.
Russell, Lillian, 32.
Tempest, Marie, 227.
"Evangeline,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
Hall, Josephine, 47.
Hall, Pauline, 245.
Templeton, Fay, 74.
"Excelsior, Jr.,"
Templeton, Fay, 75.

"Falka,"
D'Arville, Camille, 217.
Farnie, H. B., 216.
Farrington, Adele, 187.
"Fatinitza,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 99.
"Faust,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 96, 97, 99.
"Fay o' Fire,"
Tempest, Marie, 228.
"Fencing Master,"
Tempest, Marie, 230, 231, 232.
"Fiedermaus,"
Hall, Pauline, 247.
"Fille de Madame Angot,"
D'Arville, Camille, 218.
First Corps of Cadets, 82, 117.
Fiske, Minnie Maddern, 67, 70, 71, 72.
"Fleur-de-lis,"
Fox, Della, 202.
"Fortune Teller,"
Nielsen, Alice, 5, 7, 20.
Fougère, 76, 78, 79, 80.
"1492," 82.
Ashley, Minnie, 140.
Dressler, Marie, 190.
Fox, Della, 27, 42, 72, 104, 110, 111, 168, 190, 192.
"Fra Diavolo,"
Fox, Della, 193, 194, 199.
Frazer, Robert, 74.
"Frivoli,"
Tempest, Marie, 228.
Frohman, Charles, 47, 109, 111.
Fursch-Nadi, 98.
Furst, William, 201, 202.

Garcia, Emanuel, 227.
"Geisha,"
Ashley, Minnie, 135, 141.
Earle, Virginia, 23, 24, 27.
Gilman, Mabelle, 65.
Tempest, Marie, 232.
Gerard, Bettina, 117.
Gilbert, W. S., 19, 26, 31.
Gill, William, 74.
Gillette, William, 199.
Gilman, Mabelle, 56, 86.
"Gipsy Baron,"
Hall, Pauline, 247, 248.
"Girl from Maxim's,"
Hall, Josephine, 49, 50, 51.
"Girl from Paris,"
Hall, Josephine, 46, 48.
"Girl I Left Behind Me,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 110.
"Giroflé-Girofla,"
Celeste, Marie, 168.
Russell, Lillian, 32, 42.
Templeton, Fay, 74.
Glaser, Lulu, 120, 179.
Goodwin, J. Cheever, 201, 202, 204, 220.
Goodwin, N. C., 164, 247.

"Grand Duchess,"
Celeste, Marie, 168.
D'Arville, Camille, 218.
Russell, Lillian, 32, 42.
Grau, Jules, 188, 189.
"Great Metropolis,"
Celeste, Marie, 163.
"Great Ruby,"
Edwardes, Paula, 118.
"Greek Slave,"
Ashley, Minnie, 135, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146.

Hale, Philip, 202, 203, 204, 205.
"Half-a-King,"
Glaser, Lulu, 131.
MacDonald, Christie, 180.
Hall, Artie, 236.
Hall, Josephine, 46, 116.
Hall, Pauline, 179, 208, 229, 239.
Hallen, Fred, 26.
Hammerstein, Oscar, 148.
Harlow, Richard, 191.
Harris, Augustus, 228.
Hart, Joseph, 26.
Haverly, J. H., 85, 246.
Henderson, Arthur, 227.
Henderson, William J., 159.
"Hendrik Hudson,"
Templeton, Fay, 74, 75.
Herbert, Victor, 5, 6.
Herne, James A., 73.
"Highwayman,"
Clark, Hilda, 256.
"Hole in the Ground,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
"Honeymooners,"
Hall, Pauline, 241, 248.
Hopper, DeWolf, 27, 104, 110, 111, 140, 146, 170, 200, 201.
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 42, 104, 140.
"Horrors,"
Hall, Pauline, 245.
"Hoss and Hoss,"
Celeste, Marie, 164, 165, 166, 167.
"Hotel Topsy Turvy,"
Dressler, Marie, 191.
Howard, Bronson, 47.
Hoyt, Charles H., 26, 148, 164.
Huntington, Agnes, 99, 218.

"In Gay New York,"
Earle, Virginia, 27, 28.
"In Mexico" (*see* "War Time Wedding").
Irwin, May, 235.
"Ixion,"
Hall, Pauline, 247.

"Jack,"
Hall, Josephine, 47.
"Jack and the Beanstalk,"
Celeste, Marie, 169.
Lessing, Madge, 81, 82, 84, 85, 86, 87.
"Jane,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 110.
Jansen, Marie, 120, 127, 128, 248.
Jones, Walter, 146.
Juch, Emma, 98, 200.

Kelley, Edgar Stillman, 249.
"King's Fool,"
Fox, Della, 200.

Klaw and Erlanger, 82, 169, 180, 256.
"Knickerbockers,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 100.
Koster and Bial's, 81.
Kruger, Jacques, 251.

"Lady of Lyons,"
Hall, Pauline, 245.
"Lady Slavey,"
Dressler, Marie, 183, 184, 188, 191.
Earle, Virginia, 27.
Lessing, Madge, 87.
L'Allemand, Pauline, 98.
LaShelle, Kirk, 172, 173, 174, 175.
Lask, George E., 19.
"Later On,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
Lederer, George W., 25, 27, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 200.
"Lend Me Your Wife,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 109.
Lenox, Fred, 142.
Leonard, Charles E., 33, 35.
Leslie, Elsie, 197.
Leslie, Fred, 216.
Leslie, Henry J., 228.
Lessing, Madge, 81, 118.
"Lion Tamer,"
Glaser, Lulu, 127, 128.
MacDonald, Christie, 179.
"Little Corporal,"
Glaser, Lulu, 124, 131, 132.
"Little Duke,"
Celeste, Marie, 108.
Russell, Lillian, 32.
"Little Host,"
Fox, Della, 207.
"Little Red Riding Hood,"
Lessing, Madge, 86.
"Little Trooper,"
Celeste, Marie, 168.
Fox, Della, 168, 201, 202.
Lloyd, Violet, 27.
Lucia, Alice Nielsen as, 19.

MacDonald, Christie, 169, 172.
MacDonough, Glen, 232.
"Madame Favart,"
Hall, Pauline, 248.
Templeton, Fay, 75.
"Madeleine, or, the Magic Kiss,"
D'Arville, Camille, 221.
Dressler, Marie, 190.
"Maid of Plymouth,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 100.
"Mam'selle 'Awkins,"
Edwardes, Paula, 113, 116, 119.
Hall, Josephine, 47, 52, 53.
"Man in the Moon,"
Dressler, Marie, 191.
Templeton, Fay, 76, 77.
Mapleson, Colonel, 95, 96, 97.
"Marjorie,"
D'Arville, Camille, 218.
"Martha,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 99.
Martinot, Sadie, 216.
"Mascotte,"
D'Arville, Camille, 218.
Templeton, Fay, 74.

May, Edna, 147.
McCaull, John A., 40.
McLellan, C. M. S., 249.
McLellan, George B., 252.
"Meg Merrilies,"
Earle, Virginia, 27.
"Men and Women,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 110.
"Merchant of Venice,"
Gilman, Mabelle, 65.
"Merry Monarch,"
Glaser, Lulu, 128.
MacDonald, Christie, 179.
"Merry War,"
Hall, Pauline, 246.
"Merry World,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 98.
Earle, Virginia, 27.
"Midsummer Night's Dream,"
Templeton, Fay, 71, 73.
"Mikado,"
Dressler, Marie, 188.
Earle, Virginia, 26.
Nielsen, Alice, 19.
Miles, R. E. J., 243, 244.
"Mountebanks,"
Russell, Lillian, 32.
"Muldoon's Picnic,"
Fox, Della, 195.
"Mynheer Jan,"
D'Arville, Camille, 217.

"Nadjy,"
Hall, Pauline, 248.
Russell, Lillian, 41.
"Nanon,"
Hall, Pauline, 247.
National Opera Company, 98.
Neutwig, Benjamin, 10, 11.
Nielsen, Alice, 1, 219, 255.
Nirdlinger, Charles Frederick, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226.

Oates, Alice, 243, 244.
Offenbach, Jacques, 31, 216.
"One Round of Pleasure,"
Celeste, Marie, 169.
O'Neill, James, 196.
"Orpheus and Eurydice,"
Hall, Pauline, 246.

Palmer, A. M., 191.
Palmer, Frank, 166, 167.
"Panjandrum,"
Fox, Della, 194, 201.
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 106, 110, 111.
"Passing Show,"
Earle, Virginia, 27.
Lessing, Madge, 82.
Pastor, Tony, 33, 38, 39, 238
"Patience,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
Hall, Pauline, 246.
Russell, Lillian, 40.
Patti, Adelina, 96, 97.
"Paul Jones,"
D'Arville, Camille, 218.
"Penelope,"
Nielsen, Alice, 18.
"Perichole,"
Celeste, Marie, 168.
Nielsen, Alice, 19.
Russell, Lillian, 32, 42.
Perugini, Giovanni, 45.
Pike Opera Company, 18, 26.
"Pinafore,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 95.
Earle, Virginia, 26.

Fox, Della, 195, 196.
Russell, Lillian, 37.
"Pirates of Penzance,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.
Fox, Della, 199.
Plympton, Eben, 47.
"Polly,"
Russell, Lillian, 41.
"Poor Jonathan,"
D'Arville, Camille, 218.
Russell, Lillian, 32.
"Poupée,"
Gilman, Mabelle, 65.
"Prince Ananias,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 100.
Nielsen, Alice, 20.
"Prince Pro Tem,"
Ashley, Minnie, 137, 141, 142.
"Princess Bonnie,"
Clark, Hilda, 255.
"Princess Chic,"
MacDonald, Christie, 172, 176, 177, 178, 180.
"Princess Nicotine,"
Celeste, Marie, 168.
Dressler, Marie, 191.
Russell, Lillian, 32, 45.
"Princess of Trebizonde,"
Russell, Lillian, 41, 42.
Puerner, Charles, 190.
"Puritania,"
Hall, Pauline, 241, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252.

"Queen's Mate,"
D'Arville, Camille, 217.
Russell, Lillian, 32.

"Rainmakers,"
Raymond, Maud, 238.
Raymond, Maud, 233.
"Red Hussar,"
Tempest, Marie, 228, 229.
Reed, Charles, 164.
Reed, Roland, 109.
Rehan, Ada, 28.
"Reign of Error,"
Raymond, Maud, 238.
"Revels,"
Hall, Pauline, 245.
Rice, Edward E., 26, 37, 47, 140, 219, 245, 246.
"Rip Van Winkle,"
D'Arville, Camille, 216, 217.
"Robber of the Rhine,"
Dressler, Marie, 190.
"Robin Hood,"
Clark, Hilda, 255.
D'Arville, Camille, 218, 219.
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 91, 99, 100, 101.
Nielsen, Alice, 20.
Rogers Brothers, 233, 238.
"Rogers Brothers in Wall Street,"
Raymond, Maud, 235, 236, 238.
"Romeo and Juliet,"
Hall, Pauline, 245.
Root, Fred, 94.
Root, George F., 95.
"Rounders,"
Gilman, Mabelle, 56, 61, 62, 63, 65, 86.
Lessing, Madge, 86, 87.
"Runaway Girl,"
Celeste, Marie, 160, 161, 169.
Earle, Virginia, 23, 24, 28.

Edwardes, Paula, 113, 115, 116, 117, 119.
Gilman, Mabelle, 65.
Russell, Lillian, 30, 168, 191, 206, 208, 217, 229.

Sadler, Josie, 142.
"Santa Maria,"
May, Edna, 148.
Savage, Henry W., 19, 169.
Seabrooke, Thomas Q., 117.
"Serenade,"
Clark, Hilda, 255.
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 100.
Nielsen, Alice, 20.
"Seven Ravens,"
Hall, Pauline, 246, 247.
Sheldon, William, 146.
"Shenandoah,"
Hall, Josephine, 47.
"Singing Girl,"
Nielsen, Alice, 4, 5.
Smith, Edgar, 97.
Smith, Harry B., 5, 7, 65, 159, 221.
Smythe, W. G., 196.
"Snake Charmer,"
Russell, Lillian, 40.
Solomon, Edward, 41.
Solomon, Frederic, 251.
Solomon Opera Company, 82.
"Sorcerer,"
Russell, Lillian, 40.
Sothern, E. H., 197.
Sousa, John Philip, 256, 257.
Spenser, Willard, 255.
"Sphinx,"
MacDonald, Christie, 180.
Stange, Stanislaus, 5, 6.
St. John, Florence, 228.
Stone, Marie, 218.
Sullivan, Arthur, 19, 26.
Sullivan, Joe J., 237.
"Suzette,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 99.
Sykes, Jerome, 112.

Teal, Ben, 163.
"Tempest,"
Earle, Virginia, 28.
Gilman, Mabelle, 65.
Tempest, Marie, 222.
Templeton, Fay, 67.
Templeton, John, 72.
Thomas, Augustus, 196, 197, 198, 199.
Thomas, Theodore, 98.
Thompson, L. S., 141.
Titus, Fred, 147.
Tivoli Opera Company, 19.
"Tobasco,"
Edwardes, Paula, 117.
"Troubadour,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 99.
"Twenty Minutes in Shirt Waists,"
Dressler, Marie, 186, 187, 188.
"Tyrolean,"
Tempest, Marie, 229, 230.
"Tzigane,"
Celeste, Marie, 168.
Russell, Lillian, 32.

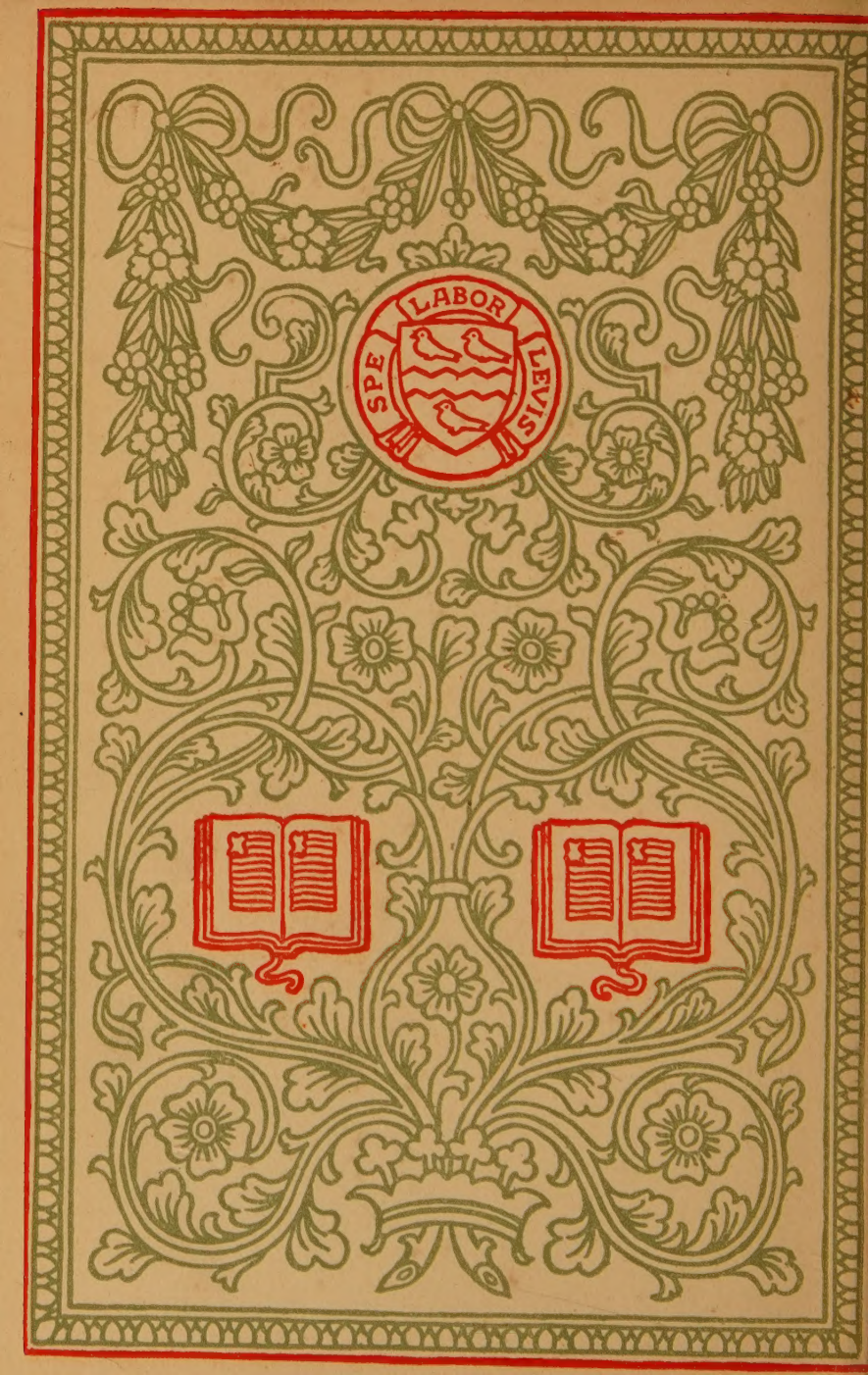
Urquhart, Isabelle, 41.

Vane, Alice, 67.
"Venus,"
D'Arville, Camille, 219, 220.

"Vie,"
D'Arville, Camille, 216.
"Virginia,"
Russell, Lillian, 41.

"Walking Delegate,"
MacDonald, Christie, 180.
"Wang,"
Celeste, Marie, 170.
Earle, Virginia, 27.
Fox, Della, 194, 201.
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 111.
"War Time Wedding,"
Davis, Jessie Bartlett, 100, 102, 103.
Nielsen, Alice, 20.
Weathersby, Eliza, 74.
Weber and Fields, 42, 75, 197.
"Wedding Day,"
Fox, Della, 206.
Russell, Lillian, 42.
Weil, Oscar, 103.
Wheelan, Alf. C., 251.
"Whirl of the Town,"
Lessing, Madge, 82.
White, Edward, 252.
Wilson, Francis, 120, 121, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 179, 240, 242, 249.
"Wonder,"
Earle, Virginia, 28.
"World's Fair,"
Earle, Virginia, 26.

"Yankee Doodle Dandy,"
Hopper, Edna Wallace, 112.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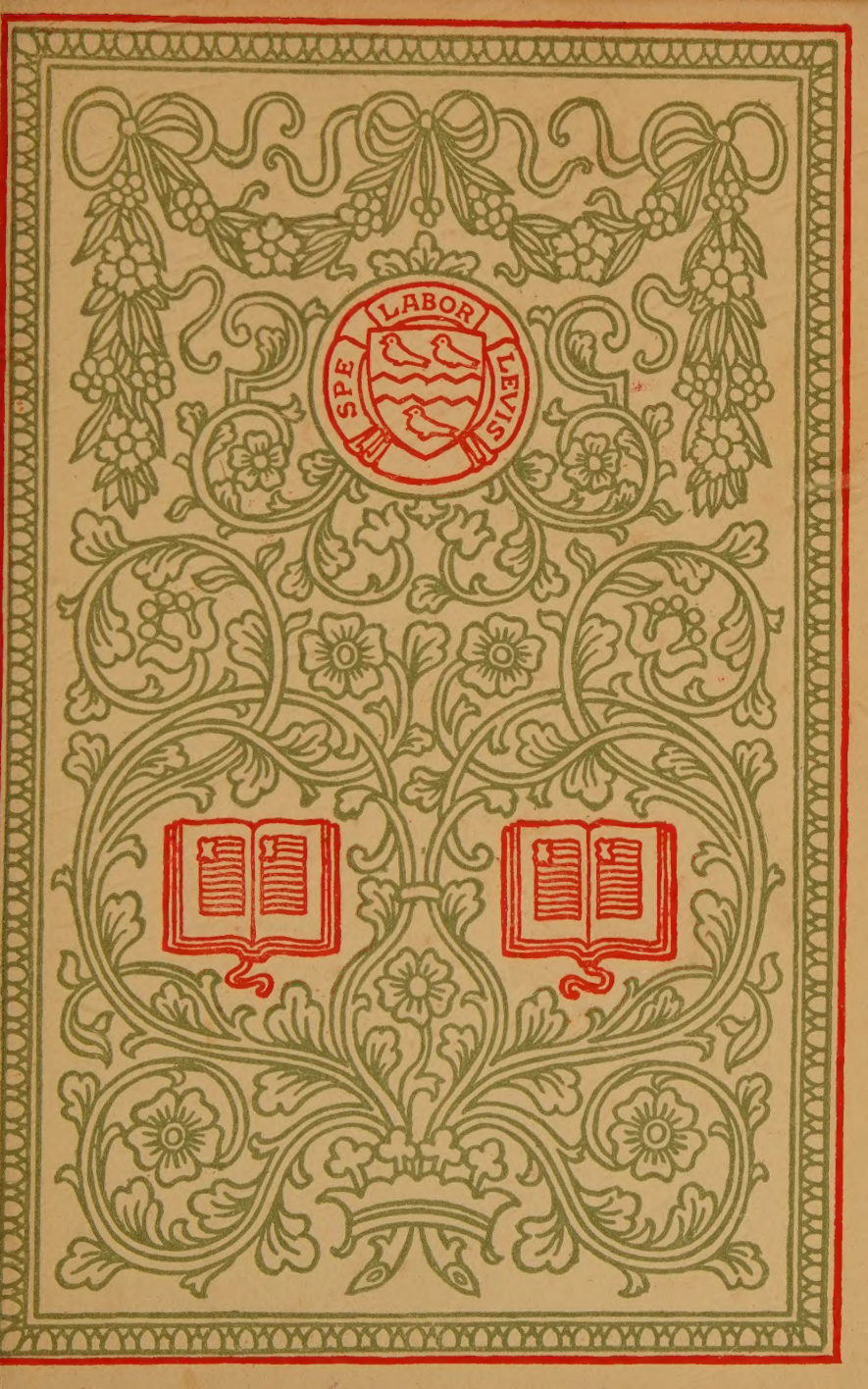
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